

THE ADMIRABLE LADY

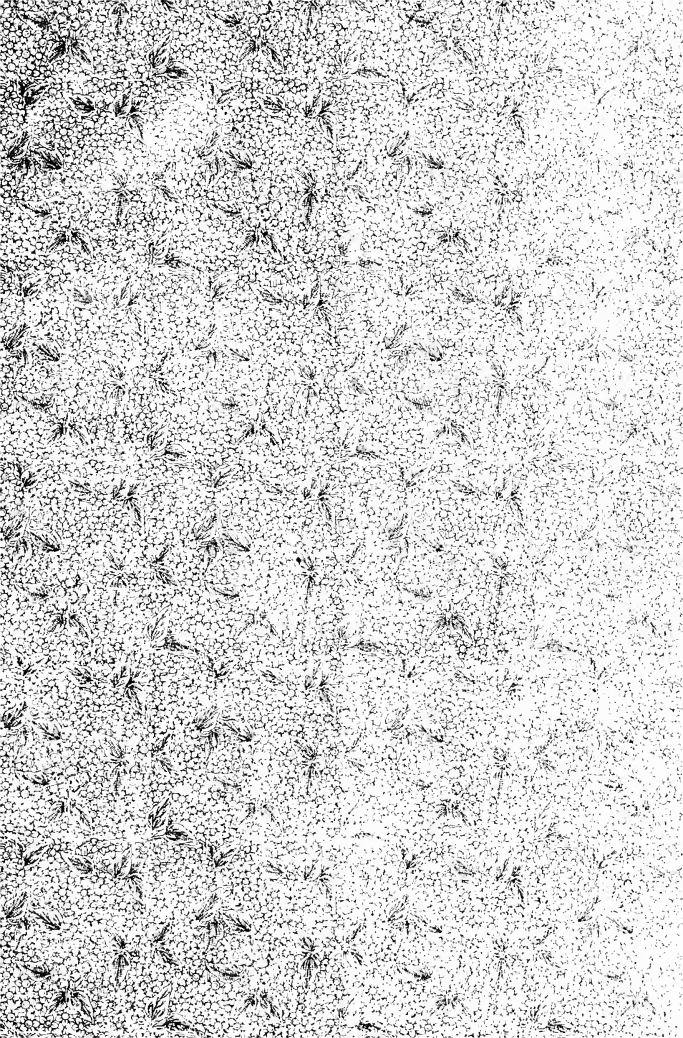
BIDDY FANE

FRANK BARRETT



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THE ADMIRABLE LADY
BIDDY FANE.

HE ADMIRABLE LADY BIDDY FANE:

HER SURPRISING CURIOUS ADVENTURES IN
STRANGE PARTS & HAPPY DELIVERANCE
FROM *PIRATES, BATTLE, CAPTIVITY*, & OTHER
TERRORS; WITH DIVERS *ROMANTIC & MOVING*
ACCIDENTS AS SET FORTH BY BENET
PENGILLY (HER COMPANION IN MISFOR-
TUNE & JOY), & NOW FIRST DONE INTO
PRINT

BY

FRANK BARRETT,

Author of "Folly Morrison," "Honest Davie," &c.

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THE ADMIRABLE LADY BIDDY FANE.



CHAPTER XLV.

WE GO FROM VALETTA TO SEEK MY LADY BIDDY
ELSEWHERE.

THE next day seemed to me as if it would never come to an end, having nothing much else to do than to watch for Matthew's return; and what made it more tedious and wearisome was that my comrade had started bidding me expect him back before midday.

"For," says he, "the next station, if I remember right, is but a matter of four or five leagues distant; so that, starting betimes, they must needs arrive about ten to eleven at the outside."

When he came not at noon I began to

torment myself with fears lest some mischance had happened to Matthew : either that he had been clapped up in a bridewell to cure him of his sores, or had been recognised by Lewis de Pino, to his great misfortune. And though this was grievous enough to think on (for I loved the kind, honest rogue), yet it was nothing beside the concern I felt for Lady Biddy had such an accident arrived; for while I was lingering here, with my hands idle by my side, Lewis de Pino might be hurrying away with her to Quito.

As soon as the first star began to twinkle I could bear this suspense no longer, and started out towards the town ; for if Matthew were free, I knew he would leave the town when the gates were about to be closed. About half a league from the town I met him (to my great joy), and my first question was what news he had brought with him.

Instead of beating about the bush and making a joke of my impatience, he answered, very soberly, that De Pino and his train had not yet entered the town.

“How’s mever,” says he, “there’s no call to be cast down about that matter, for I may very well have made a mistake in the distance, seeing I have travelled over the road but once, and that ten or a dozen years ago. One thing is certain, master—they must arrive to-morrow, and this delay is all to our advantage, since it has given me time to pry about the town, and examine in what manner we may best contrive to get the female out of De Pino’s hands.”

Therewith he entered into the design he had formed for this purpose, describing the inn at which the merchants stayed, with the means of getting out of the town, and into it, without passing the gate, etc. etc., in such detail that he gave me no time to think of anything else till we had eaten our supper and emptied the wine-skin, when he declared he was too tired to converse longer; and so, laying himself down, bade me good-night, and presently began to snore.

But then, my mind being no longer occupied with his return, I grew uneasy again about this delay, and could not close an eye for my trouble.

I had noticed that Matthew was much less merry than usual, and now I took it into my head that the long-winded description of the inn, and his ingenious project for rescuing "the female," was nothing but a design to divert my mind, and make his own uneasiness less noticeable.

'Twas useless attempting to sleep in this disorder of mind, and I could no longer lie still when day broke; but getting up quietly, so that I might not awake Matthew, I went to a little distance and paced backwards and forwards with a heavy heart. Presently Matthew, getting up, comes to my side, and says he—

"Can't you sleep, master?"

"No," says I.

"No more can I," says he, "and I took a pretty stiff dose of wine, too, for my nightcap. I ha'n't slept a wink all night."

"You've snored pretty continually, nevertheless," says I.

"As for that," says he, "I'm a man that must be doing of something; and 'tis as easy to snore as to wear spots on your face; but one is

no more a sign of sleep than t'other is of a distemper."

"Why couldn't you sleep, Matthew?" says

I. "What's amiss?"

"Well," says he, "De Pino and the female ought to have come in yesterday morning at the latest."

"But you said you might have made a mistake as to the distance?"

"So I might," says he slyly; "but, to make quite sure, I took the pains to inquire last night of my friend at the inn, outside the town, and I found I had not."

"Then you believe they ought to have been here before now?" says I sharply.

"Yes, master," says he gravely. "They ought to have come in the night afore last, or yesterday morning at the latest. When it came noon yesterday I gave them up; yet I stayed there in the hope I was wrong. First saying to myself that, being warned of your escape by the factor, De Pino had thought it well to make an ambush, and wait for you to come up; and then that

he had stopped for some reason of his business; but these arguments wouldn't do—and, to cut a long story short, I made up my mind when I saw the gates closed last night, and no sign of De Pino along the road for half a mile—I made up my mind, I say, that he had taken another road."

"Taken another road!" says I, in a terrible amazement.

"Ay," says he. "I can account for it in no other way."

"And why did you not tell me this last night?" I asks angrily.

"We could do nothing in the dark, and I hoped you would get a good night's sleep and be fresh for a march this morning," says he simply. "There was no good in plaguing you before your time."

I could not be angry with the fellow after that, for he was in the right, and 'twas out of pure kindness of heart he had held his tongue.

"I thought you were so sure of the road, Matthew?" says I.

"So I was, master; and more fool I. Don't

spare me ; I deserve all the blame, for 'twas I who would have you come by the river when you would have gone by the road."

"Did you make no inquiry about this road last night?"

"Ay," says he. "No other road to Quito is known to the innkeeper but this. Yet he may be as great a fool as I in that matter ; and though De Pino could take no other road to Quito, he might, for all that, have turned aside to some other place."

"What do you propose we should do now, Matthew?"

"Get on to the road, and hark back as soon as there is light enough for us to pick our way. We will hit the road within sight of the town-gates before they are opened, to make certain they have not come up."

The poor fellow was so crestfallen, having now no heart to disguise his discomfiture, that to cheer him I professed to be in no way disheartened by this failure.

"For," says I, "there is this advantage about

it: I shall not have ~~any~~ ^{rest} ~~idea~~ ^{idea} here any longer. 'Twill be light enough to begin our march in half an hour."

"Why, that's true, master," says he, brightening up; "and, not to waste time, we'll have a good meal to strengthen us against fatigue."

"There's nothing to eat," says I; "we finished every scrap last night."

"Nay," says he; "I laid out for that, and brought home a peck loaf and a roast loin of mutton with me last night."

I remembered he was pretty well charged when we met over-night, but had taken no heed of what he carried, thinking in the dark it was but another skin of wine.

"Maccaws are all very well for high feeding, and so are serpents and suchlike," says he, fetching his loaf and the loin of mutton, "but give me bread and roast mutton when there's work to be done."

When we had finished our repast, Matthew buckled on his sword, and we started off. Striking the road after an hour's march, and making

sure that no cavalcade lay between us and the town, we turned our faces to the north, and strode out with a will ; nor did we check our pace for two hours, albeit the way lay all up hill and that none too smooth. We met not a soul all that time, for only merchants with their trains of mules, etc., pass this way, and they not frequently, so that for a whole week there may not be a single traveller to be met. Indeed, we had scarcely dared to travel that way otherwise, for our appearance would have justified any one in taking us for outlaws—I in my tattered finery, with a peck loaf slung on my shoulders, a great knife in my girdle, a long sword in my hand, and nothing but an uncombed crop of hair on my head ; and Matthew likewise fiercely armed, with a wine-skin and a bundle of broken victuals at his back, scarcely enough clothes to cover his nakedness, and a complexion as if he had just escaped from a lazar-house—in fine, as unwelcome a knight and squire as any one might wish to meet. Nor were our movements much more reassuring than our looks, for at every turn

of the road we would stop with our swords firmly gripped, peering round the rocks and betwixt the bushes, as if we were on the look-out for some one to waylay and murder.

At length we came in sight of a station, and here with great prudence we went about to spy into it, and yet not be seen ourselves; and this, by reason of its position and the chance of encountering hunters in the surrounding wood, was a painful and tedious business; but finally getting upon the further side, and crawling near with terrible fear (lest we might arouse some watch-dog, and so have a repetition of our former trouble), we got a fair sight into the village, where was nothing to be seen but four bearded rascals playing of cards. And so, creeping out of that wood as carefully as we had crept in, we once more got into the road, and pushed onward till noon without stopping, except at the bends of the road as aforesaid.

At noon we stopped to eat and refresh ourselves, and that done, we went onward again for best part of two hours, though the sun was now

at his height ; but by reason we were now very high up on the side of the mountain, and that in many places the rock sheltered us with an agreeable shade, we were not so hot but that we could still march with a good heart. Yet here we stayed to consult together, for we had come to a part of the road where we could not conceal ourselves if we met Lewis de Pino, nor retreat without exposing ourselves to the fire of his arquebuses. For the path wound along close by the side of the mountain, with no growth of herbs, and all barren for a long distance in front ; nor was it possible to get out of the path by clambering upwards or sliding downwards for the prodigious steepness of it, and the road so narrow that no two pack-mules could pass each other, except by standing aside in certain cavities hewn here and there in the rock in case of one train meeting another. Down below lay the woods, but so deep that the highest tree-tops came no nearer than a couple of hundred feet of where we stood.

“ Master,” says Matthew, “ if we meet De

Pino and his merry men on this road 'twill be a bad job for us."

"Ay," says I; "and the sooner we get to the other end of it the safer we shall be."

"Lord love you, master," says he, "what a thing it is to be a philosopher! Here might I jeopardise my precious life another ten minutes but for your wisdom."

CHAPTER XLVI.

HOW WE CAME TO THAT PLACE WHICH I CALL THE
VALLEY OF DEATH.

As we followed this path we discovered that, where opportunity offered, bridges of long trees had been thrown from one jutting rock to another, to save the labour of cutting a way in the side of the mountain. We had crossed two of these bridges when Matthew, being ahead of me, suddenly mended his pace, and then, coming to a stand, turns about and cries—

“Hang me if I wasn’t right after all, master. They have come along this road, but have turned back.”

“How can you answer for that, friend?” says I.

“Why, look you,” says he, pointing to the road a dozen yards ahead of us. “Here is a bridge broke.”

Stepping briskly forward, I found that it truly was as he said, for there yawned a great gap, which no man could jump; and that there had been a bridge here we could plainly see by the print of the tree-trunks in the rubble on the ledge cut for them in the rock. Moreover, looking over the edge, we spied one of these timbers lying athwart of a rock down below.

This discovery so comforted me (for I made sure I was now near my Lady Biddy, instead of being all at sea as to her whereabouts) that I set up a great shout of joy.

"For the love of Heaven, master, have a care!" cried Matthew in a whisper, after listening a moment in terror. "Did you not hear that answer to your shout?"

"Nay," says I; "what answer?"

"I know not," says he, looking around him in a scare; "pray Heaven it be not our enemies."

"Nonsense," says I, beside myself with this return of hope; "'twas but an echo from the rocks—hark!" And with that I hallooed again

as loud as I could, which was the maddest thing to do, and not to be done save by a man reckless with despair or with joy.

On this Matthew claps his hand on his mouth in terror, as if it was he who had sung out, and then lifting his finger crouches down on his hams, overcome with fear, and expecting nothing less, I believe, than to be riddled with musket-balls the next minute. But he had cause for alarm, and I only was the fool, for now I distinctly heard over and above the echoes of my voice a cry harsh and hoarse, but like nothing human, so that I was brought to my sober senses in a moment. So we stood silent and still for the space of a minute, wondering whence this sound came (and I not much braver than Matthew), and then I fell laughing like a fool.

“See,” says I, pointing to a great buzzard which was sweeping in a circle over the trees below, “there is the only enemy I have roused, and one whose flight is more to be counted on than his attack.”

But Matthew would not join in my mirth,

and, albeit he got back his courage presently, he was not so light of heart as he had been before, for he took this bird to be a sign of ill-omen

“Come, master,” says he, “instead of playing the fool here, let us think how we are to get t’other side of this chasm, unless you are minded to rest here content. For my own part, I see no way to get across.”

“Have patience with me, Matthew,” says I, seeing I had wounded his feelings by laughing at his terror. “I have been so unhappy that this change in our fortune has turned my head.”

“Lord love you, master,” says he kindly, “I like a jest as well as any man, but hang me if I see any joking matter here, or any change of fortune to be charmed with. For at the next station De Pino will get all the Portugals he can to return with his own fellows to restore this bridge, so we are like to have a score of arquebuses against us instead of ten or a dozen.”

This brought our danger and our difficulties so clearly to my mind that I grew sober at once, and began to cast about with Matthew very earnestly how we might bridge the chasm. But there was nothing there for such a purpose, and there was no way but to climb up the rocks or down until we found some jutting points by which we could scramble along the face of the mountain. After calculating by which method we were least likely to break our necks, we resolved to go upwards, yet had we to go back some way to get at any part that could be scaled. But after climbing up some fifty feet we found ourselves (thanks be to God) on a ledge of smooth rock, which we had not seen from the road below for its height and the rock that overhung it higher up. This ledge, as I judge, had been formed by a slip in the mountain, for there a seam of glittering rock ran all along beside it; but be that as it may, it formed a level path as good as that we had quitted, and better, though mighty narrow in parts, so that it was a ticklish business to go forward, and that moving sideways

and clinging with every nail to the rock ; and the narrowest part was (as luck would have it) just over that part where the bridge had been broken away, so that we felt exceeding grateful to Providence when we were safe on the other side.

We now considered whether we should get down again into the made road, but seeing the side was still vastly steep and difficult to descend, we were content to follow our ledge, in the hope we should presently come to a part where we might descend more easily. We had gone about a hundred yards when, looking over the side, I stopped, and called Matthew's attention to the road below.

"Lord love us, master," cried he, casting his eye down, "why, there's another bridge gone!"

There was, indeed, another great gap in the road, not less extensive than the first.

"Can you make out what this signifies?" says Matthew.

"No," says I. "'Tis no accident, that's pretty

clear ; and it looks as if it were done of a design to check pursuit."

"What pursuit had they for to fear?" says Matthew ; "not ours, to be sure." Then scratching his head, after tilting his hat forward, as was his wont, he says, half aloud, as if trying to grasp the points of the problem, "They are going south ; they cross the first bridge and come to the second. They destroy that so carefully that not a stick is left ; go back, cross the first bridge again, and pull that down as carefully as they had served the other." He could make nothing of it, which seemed to exasperate him ; for he presently claps his hat back in its place, and dropping on his hands and knees, the better to survey the road, cranes over the edge of the rock, casting his eye to the right, and then to the left, and finally fixing it on the ground beneath.

"Master," says he, "do you tell me what marks you see in the road down there."

So down go I on my hands and knees, and after looking intently for some time—

"I can see," says I, "the marks of the mules' feet in the dust, but whether they are turned north or south I can't make out."

"Nor I, neither," says he; "but do you see anything besides?"

"I see a track where the hoofmarks seem to be smudged out; as if something had been dragged along the ground towards the edge of the abyss."

"That's what I mean. Now what does that argify?" he asks, getting off his hands, squatting on his heels, and once more scratching his head.

I could make no reply, but still leaned over, trying to make out these marks.

"Good God!" exclaimed Matthew, all of a sudden, "what's this?"

Turning about hastily, I found him regarding a patch on the rock just in front of where he was kneeling. Looking closer, I saw that it was almost black, yet with a purple tinge. Matthew scraped it with his nail, and as it showed deep red below the surface he looks up into my

face and says, dropping his voice almost to a whisper—

“Blood!”

Glancing round, he scanned the rocky ledge behind him; then suddenly he points his finger without a word to another stain not a foot off; but this told its tale more clearly, for it formed the print of an open hand; as if a wounded man, after trying to stanch the blood from a wound, had been forced to clap that hand on the rock to save him from falling into the road below.

That others had been on that ledge before us was clear enough, but it beat me to know how a wounded man could have crawled up there, or what his purpose had been.

“Come on, master,” says Matthew, springing to his feet, “we must lose no time. This riddle concerns us, or I am wrong in my reckoning. God grant no mischief has come to the female; that’s all I pray.”

My heart was chilled to hear him speak thus, for I saw that he argued more from these signs than he chose to tell, and that he had grave

fears to make him utter this prayer. I followed him close at his heels, quaking in every muscle for fear, until we came to a part where it looked possible to slide down into the road without very great danger; yet was it such a venture as we might not have made at another time, but Matthew was as desperate as I.

“Master,” says he, as we lay down to slip over the edge; “we’ll both let go at the same time, so that one may not have to bury the other if this hazard does our business.”

So we hung over the side, and, recommending ourselves to Providence, nodded to each other, and let go. In about two minutes we slid down fifty feet and more; but by a happy chance came on our feet to the bottom in the middle of that narrow road, not much more bruised and torn than we had expected at the best.

As soon as he had fetched breath, Matthew falls to examining the dust in the road foot by foot, going in the direction of the chasm where the bridge had been broke (the northernmost of the two), I following in silence, for I had not his

intelligence, yet looking stupidly on the ground, as if I expected to see Lady Biddy's history writ there.

When he had come right to the edge of the gulf and could go no further, he turns to me and says very gravely—

“Master, have you got a stout heart?”

“Ay,” says I; but my voice belied me, for it was feeble as a child's, knowing by this prelude that he had come to a conclusion which must be terrible to my ear.

Matthew unslung his wine-skin and bade me drink.

“For,” says he, “I warn you there is a call on all your manhood.”

When I had drunk I bade him tell me the worst of his fears.

“Look you,” says he, pointing to the dust of the road, “here are the marks of mules' hoofs, and here the prints of those great boots the Portugals wear.”

“Yes,” says I, waiting with a throbbing heart for what was to follow hence.

“The boot-prints go all in one direction—south; not one is turned north as I can find; but the mules’ hoofs turn both south and north; and see, here is one turned north that is right in the midst of a footprint turned south.”

“Go on, Matthew,” says I faintly, yet with a show of courage, that he might finish.

“The Ingas have been at work. I see the hand of those murderous savages in this; yet we should not call ’em hard names neither, for they only do that for revenge which the Portugals do for gold. They dread and hate every white face, and from time to time they travel in a great band leagues and leagues to come to a place like this, where they may rid themselves of these Portugal tyrants. Here was a place after their very heart. They destroy the further bridge, and when De Pino has passed the hither one they come from their ambuscade, which, as we know, was in the rock above, and withdraw those timbers as they had served the others, which they may have been loosing and preparing for weeks, and thus, when the whole train can neither go onward nor

backward, they go up to the ledge again, and shoot down with their arrows from the rock above every one of their enemies. Then, when their deadly work is finished, they replace the timbers to fetch off the mules and their booty. To end all, they cast down the timbers to delay discovery and give themselves time to escape. This is how it comes about that yonder we see the hoofs turned north, but not a single foot-mark of those who went south with them."

"Out with it, Matthew!" I cries, in a passion of despair; "tell me that she is massacred with the rest—that not one has escaped!"

"Master," says he, with a great compassion in his voice, "the Ingas have no more pity for a white woman than a white man. All are gone!"

"No, no!" cries I imploringly; "'tis not so. They found the bridge broke and went back."

Without a word Matthew put his hand on my arm and pointed down to the valley where

the great buzzard that I had laughed at but half an hour before was again sweeping round above the trees.

My heart stopped, and I felt it lie like a cold stone within me as I thought upon what dainty flesh this foul bird of carrion had been gorging.

CHAPTER XLVII.

WE GO DOWN INTO THAT VALLEY OF DEATH.

I KNEW too well what Matthew meant by this silent indication. He would have me to understand that the Ingas' slaughtered victims had been cast down the precipice (as the traces in the road bore out), and that the carrion birds were already feasting on their bodies.

My imagination could furnish forth no argument against the justice of this conclusion, and having now no hope to animate me, all about me appeared a blank, as if my heart could no longer feel, and all my faculties were stunned. So I stood there, watching the buzzard whirl round and round, as if I had nothing in the world to do but that.

I was aroused from this apathy by Matthew laying his hand on my shoulder again, and saying in a gentle voice—

“Master, would it ease your mind to talk about her?”

Then I felt that I would like to pour out the grief from my heart, yet not to Matthew; so I turned away in an agony, thinking there was no one in the wide world to sympathise with me now she was gone. Who but I knew how gentle and sweet her nature was, and what words of mine could ever tell her praise as she deserved? Then recalling her sweet face, her delicate, gracious manner, the pretty tone of her voice, and in particular certain little kind words she had given me, with an encouraging look now and again, her brave habit of looking on the better side of our misfortunes to cheer me up, the dainty movement of her hands, and one or two little episodes wherein she had shown a pleasant wit—recalling these things, I say, and reflecting that they could never, never be repeated, my heart was wrung with bitter grief.

“Master,” says Matthew again, seeing that I was in such great pain—“master, are you minded

to find her body, and save her from those vile birds ? ”

I nodded eagerly ; not because of my respect for the dead so much as that I longed to look once more upon that dear face, and kneel down beside her in secret, and weep, if the tears could find vent from my heart.

So we began to cast about how we might get down into that deep valley ; and while I was spying below I noticed that the buzzard was perched on a point of rock about midway down, and near him were perched two others. Seeing this, a wild idea came across my mind, and calling to Matthew I bade him observe these birds, and then says I—

“ Why are they there ? ”

He looked at me as not quite seeing my drift.

“ If they are all dead below there, would those birds stand aloof ? Why have they been soaring round and round above the trees this half-hour and more ? ”

“ What you say, master,” says he, “ is very

much to the point. Certainly they do not use to hold off in this manner, except there be sign of life in their prey. And yet" (looking down the abyss) "is it possible that any one hurled down from this height could survive the shock five minutes? Nay, even if the bough of a tree did somewhat break the fall, the poor wretch would be so broken that death were preferable to such a maimed existence."

I wasted no time in replying to this argument, for now I had no thought but that my dear lady yet breathed. And I must needs think it was she of all those who had been thrown down that had escaped, though any one not distracted with a new-born hope would have seen that her frail body least of any could survive that terrible catastrophe.

I ran along the road, seeking a place to descend, with Matthew at my heels, imploring me to have a care of my own life, and not rashly expose myself to death for the sake of two minutes. However, I paid no heed to his warning, but at the first point where there seemed a

possibility of climbing down the rocks to the valley I made the attempt.

“Master, master !” cries Matthew, “for the love of Heaven, don’t go down there. ’Tis a hundred chances to one we be dashed to pieces that way. Look you a hundred yards ahead ; there is a safer way.”

“Nay,” says I, “stay where you are, Matthew, or go a safer way. I make no doubt that Providence will help me here as before.”

“If you go I go, master,” says he, following without a moment’s hesitation. “For I count upon Providence being as merciful to me as to you, though my legs *be* shorter.”

We got down the face of that mountain-side better than we might have expected from the look of it above (though how, I know not), and with no great hurt, thanks be to God. And now, being at the top of that slope on which the trees grew, though still a prodigious height above the bottom of the valley, we made our way over the crags and scattered stones towards that part which lay below the road between the two

bridges, which we made out at a distance clearly enough, because there the rock was straight down as any wall, and its side brushed by the arms of the great pine-trees we had observed from above. When we got amongst these trees, the first sign of the Ingas' business was seen in the timbers of the bridge, of which one stood on end, held so by the boughs of the pine through which it had passed, but the rest lay splintered amongst the rocks. Matthew said nothing, but I saw by a toss of his head and a desponding look in his face that he was asking himself how any human being could escape death by such a fall when these solid timbers had been shivered in pieces. Then perceiving we could be at no great distance from where the bodies had been flung down, I grew sick with the dread of seeing at the next footstep the crushed and mangled form of my dear lady, so that I could go no further for the weakness of my legs, but was forced to lean against a tree for support, while a cold sweat came out upon my face.

Observing my case, Matthew without a word

slung round his wine-skin, which he had brought down (though our swords and all else that was dispensable we had left above), and gave me to drink, but would have me sit down to it, making out he could not lift the skin high enough else by reason it was nearly empty.

“Do you feel a bit stronger now, master?” says he kindly, when I had drunk.

“Ay,” says I; “in a minute I shall be ready to go on.”

While I was bracing up my courage, he silently went on a dozen paces, and then he comes to a stand, so that I knew he was in the presence of the dead; for had there been any room for hope he would not have stopped short. Then I forced myself to rise, and went to his side, where he stood with one hand on a pine-tree, looking beyond; indeed, the spectacle to be seen thence was enough to bring any one to a stand.

At another time we might have rested there in admiration of nature's handiwork, for we stood on the edge of a glade made fertile by a fountain

which, springing from the mountain-side, fell into a rocky basin, and thence spread abroad over the hillside ; and it seemed as if all rank and gross-growing things had been weeded out of this chosen spot, and only such plants left as might delight the eye. The trunk of every tree served as a pillar for creeping vines to twine around, and the boughs as a trellis for them to festoon and garland from end to side ; which vines were gaily decked one and all with blossoms of every form and tint, so that above and around was naught but a transparent tapestry of bloom, through which the light penetrated in soft hues, as it might through the rich painted window of a cathedral ; yet softer and more tender than ever I have yet seen. Then in contrast with this gorgeous canopy of colour, the ground spread out all carpeted with light feather-plants and slender grasses, while here and there stood up a rock coated over with long soft moss, all of a cool greenness most refreshing to the eye.

But now it was horror that brought us to a stand, since such a loathsome sight met our eyes

as would have appalled the heart of a Nero. For some distance around the herbage was beaten down and strewn with what seemed rather the refuse and outcasting of a shambles than aught else ; for only on looking close could one see that this torn flesh was from the head of man, that those broken bones were of a human body, etc.

This spectacle was made more ghastly by contrast with the life, the peace, the gaiety, and loveliness of its surroundings. Terrible it was to see how this wreck of humanity was wreathed about with those sweet blooms they had torn down in falling through the boughs of the trees. 'Twas as if Death had arrayed himself in mockery with the flowers of Cupid. Here trailed a spray of tender green with purple blooms over the black and festering vitals torn from the chest of an arquebusier, and there from a bed of rose-pink buds gaped out a face (which I recognised presently for Lewis de Pino's) with dull, staring eyes, and a black, protruding tongue. Nor were our eyes alone shocked by this loathsome contrast;

for in place of sweet odours from the flowers we were sickened by a stench of corruption which did seem to poison every breath I drew.

My first thought (when my horror abated, and I could reason at all) was that those Ingas Matthew spoke of were a race of cannibals, who, after casting down their victims, had descended to glut their abominable appetite here at leisure and in security; yet on closer inspection I could not believe this neither, for the bodies had not been stripped, but their clothes had been torn away with the flesh from their bones, so that it looked more as if a band of famished fiends had been to this feast than any mortal creatures.

I could no longer believe that Lady Biddy lived—nay, I could not hope that she did; yet my eye wandered wildly over the ground for some trace of her. Then thinking she might yet lie hid beyond one of those many stones I have mentioned, I set out upon this horrible quest, picking my way amidst the remains of these mangled enemies.

I had not gone far when Matthew, plucking me by the sleeve, says—

“Master, that is why the carrion birds have kept aloof.”

And casting my eyes whither he pointed his finger I perceived, about twenty paces away, two great spotted ounces, which the Ingas call jagoaretes, stretched out at full length in the herbage—one with his paw set on a body which he had dragged thither.

At the sound of Matthew's voice the beasts raised their heads; then, seeing us, one of them got on his feet and the other sat up on his haunches. Presently he who was on his feet bared his teeth and gave a menacing growl, lashing his tail the while from side to side.

We had taken off our swords above and left them there, as I have said, for fear they should trip us in our descent, so that we had nothing to defend ourselves with against these brutes; nor could I see anything proper for that purpose, the savages having carried off all the Portugals' weapons. So here we stood, within a few bounds

of those savage ounces, with no means of attack or defence.

“Don’t stir, master, for the love of Heaven,” says Matthew; “if we turn tail we shall be cat’s-meat for a certainty.”

And now the other ounce got on his feet, and, stretching out his neck, showed his teeth, yet without growling, for they were both gorged to their full, and heavy with their food.

Seeing they were not disposed to come at us, Matthew unslings his wine-skin, and, swinging it in his hand, makes pretence to draw nigh them, as if he would take them by surprise; on which the ounces, as not knowing what to make of it, dropped their tails and shrunk back their heads. Then one of them drawing back a pace, the other takes alarm, and, turning round, trots off; and the first, being in no mind to fight, presently does the same, whereupon Matthew, hallooing with all his might, runs after them with such good effect that they set up a howl of terror and were far out of sight ere he had gone a dozen yards.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A GREAT CHANGE IN OUR FORTUNE, WHEREBY I HEAR
THE MOST JOYFUL, PLEASING NEWS HEART
COULD DESIRE.

THE jagoaretes being gone, I advanced towards the place where they had been lying, to see what body they had dragged apart from the rest to devour. But ere I had made half a dozen paces I stopped, and the cold sweat burst out again upon my brow on observing, amidst the crushed and blood-blackened feather-plants, a fair pale body that had been stripped of clothing. At a glance I perceived that it was too slight and delicate for the corse of a man, nor could I for a moment think it was the body of an arquebusier and a Portugal. "'Tis she," thinks I, "'tis she. The savages have stripped her sweet body for their vile pleasure, or for the sake of her pretty gown; why else should this one be

singled from the other bodies?" I covered my eyes with my hands to shut out the sight of that poor mangled body; yet I saw it still—ay, as plain as if my eyes had been uncovered. All hope was gone from me, so that I had no desire to prove the truth of my conviction. Yet presently I felt that I must do my last duty by her and carry her whither those carrion birds and foul beasts might not further mutilate her mortal remains. So with my gorge rising I stepped forward again and uncovered my eyes. One arm had been torn from the trunk, but the head was untouched, and as I turned my reluctant eyes upon it my bitter feeling towards Providence for thus cruelly bereaving me of my darling was of a sudden changed to gratitude and thankfulness, for I perceived the face was none but that of the little Portugal boy Don Lewis had given my lady for her page.

Yet I had still my dear lady to find, and so once more I turned me round to scan the grizzly scene of havoc. And thus was I standing benumbed with despair when Matthew came

briskly to my side, and, taking me by the arm, drew me rapidly on, saying in a low voice—

“Quick, master. Let us get back to the rocks, where we may at least have something to hurl for our defence. For though I count we have not an hour to live, yet will we sell our lives dearly, and die as becomes men.”

Saying this he drew me towards a tree, and from that to another, and so to a third, as if seeking the shelter of their trunks. Yet, at the same time, edging away towards the scattered rocks at the foot of the precipice.

“Nay, friend,” says I, “what is there to fear? You have scared off the ounces with your hallooing.”

“Ay,” says he, “and I wish to Heaven I had let ’em sleep on, and played no such silly trick ; for in scaring away one enemy I have roused up another, with a plague to me.—Behind that tree, master,” shoving me to the right, and then adds he, “The ounces were surfeited with their meal ; but these others have only had their appetite whetted for carnage.”

“Which others?” says I, greatly perplexed, yet going forward as he would have me.

“The Ingas,” says he; “I spied one of the naked wretches as I turned about to come back to you. He was squatting amidst the herbage at the back of us; but I reckon they have shifted their place as quick as we, and Lord knows whether we shall gain shelter amidst the rocks before they get a fair aim at us with their arrows.”

Scarcely had these words passed his lips when an arrow flew past us and stuck in the tree we were about to pass.

“That’s a nigh squeak,” says Matthew. “Take no notice, master. Push on. If we get to yonder rock we shall have the mountain at our back for a comfort.”

Another arrow flew past and stuck in a tree before us.

“That’s odd,” says Matthew; “they don’t use to miss their mark in this manner.”

Still making our way towards the rocks, a

third arrow flew past with the same effect as before.

“Thrice they’ve missed us, and thrice hit a tree before us,” says Matthew, “and every time on a level with our breasts. If this happens again, ’twill be a sign they are aiming at the trees, and not at us, though with what intent I know not.”

As if his words had been heard, a fourth arrow flew by, straight to a tree a dozen paces ahead.

“We must look at that arrow, master,” says Matthew. “’Tis on your side ; drag it out or break it off as you pass.”

Now this business had taken longer in the doing than I have spent in telling, for the rock we were making for lay at some distance, and we made a crooked way thither by reason of bobbing from one tree to another, which was labour we might have spared ourselves, for it only enabled our pursuer to arm his bow the more frequently. I make this explanation because it is the vicious practice of some men to cast doubt upon very true history since it is not

of their writing ; while others, by reason of their short sight, must have everything pointed out and magnified ere they will believe of its existence ; but, there, I should never come to an end of this matter were I to set about satisfying every silly caviller. This by the way : now to continue my history.

Going to do Matthew's bidding, I stretched out my hand to lay hold of the arrow sticking in the tree ; but ere my fingers touched it I stopped short with a cry of joy.

" Lord love you, master, what's the matter ? " cries Matthew.

" Look," says I, pointing to the head of the arrow buried in the soft bark. " Do you see this shred of black lace bound to the shaft ? "

" Ay," says he, " and 'tis the first time I ever saw an arrow feathered in that fashion."

" 'Tis part of my dear lady's gown," cries I, snatching the arrow away, and pressing the lace to my lips, with a mad hope that she lived, and that this was a token sent by her.

Another arrow, being the fifth thus dis-

charged, shot into the trunk close by the head of the fourth; and now I gave another joyful shout, for round the head of this was bound a little lock of hair that shone in the sun like burnished copper.

“’Tis a lock of her dear hair. My dearest lady, my darling lives! she lives—she lives!” says I, with the same extravagant joy as before.

“’Tis a message from her.”

“That may be,” says Matthew cheerily; “but one thing is certain—the Ingas mean us no harm; for they might have riddled us like so many colanders by this, had they been so minded, for all our care.”

Casting our eyes about, we now spied a young Inga (as naked as Adam) standing beside a tree at about a dozen yards off, with a bow in his hand, and a sheaf of arrows, in a long wallet, slung to his shoulder. He cried out something in his own tongue, upon which Matthew (who had got the language by one of his wives) turns to me and says—

“I don’t know what this fellow means, master,

for he wants to know which of us saved his wife from the Portugals. However, 'tis no good to stand nice about fibs at this time, so I shall tell him you did."

"That you may with truth," says I, as it suddenly came home to my mind that this Indian's wife must be that poor slave my dear lady had set free and I had saved from the shot of the arquebusier; "for though 'twas Lady Biddy who enabled the poor woman to get free, yet I struck up the arquebuse which was levelled to shoot her down." This history I gave to Matthew now, and he gave it again to the Inga, who, not liking this sign of hesitation, asked sternly (still with his arrow on the string) why he had not answered at once before consulting me.

"Lord love you, master," replies Matthew in the fellow's own tongue (as he afterwards told me), "Englishmen are so used to practising charity that we had to think a moment to recollect such a trifle as that. I'm an Englishman," he adds hastily, for fear the Inga might

be minded to despatch him as having no personal call on his gratitude.

“Ask him,” says I, “if Lady Biddy, who had his wife freed from her yoke, lives.” When, in response to this question, the Inga bowed his head, I rushed forward with my arms wide to embrace him, for my joy knew no bounds. He let me take his hand in mine, and smiled kindly to see how I was moved; for he also had lost and found, being, as I say, the husband of that poor slave my Lady Biddy had saved. Then from the bottom of his wallet he drew out a piece of the lace my dear lady had given him, and also a thick tress of her hair; showing me that he had yet half a dozen arrows in his sheaf bound like those already shot.

“Master,” says Matthew, who had moved up to my side, and was still in a mighty taking lest the Inga should do him a mischief, “while he is in a good humour do you put in a sign or two to signify I am your friend.”

So I turned about, and grasped Matthew’s

hand without pretence (for I felt that I owed him my life and happiness), to show that I loved him much.

The Inga ceased to smile, and regarded Matthew from top to toe in silence; for these hunted Indians have need of all precautions, being so frequently tricked by treacherous Portugals; and he was the more doubtful of Matthew because he spoke the Inga tongue in the manner of those accursed Portugals.

“Oh, Lord!” says Matthew, “he don’t like the look of me.”

Then the Inga put many searching questions to him sharply, and might more readily have believed his replies but that poor Matthew, being of a quake for his life, did rub his hands together as if he were a-washing them, cringing and smiling like any chandler, which was altogether the wrong way to win over an Inga; for they are a proud race, but not sycophants. However, in the end this Inga laid his hand on Matthew’s breast (as he had on mine) for a sign of faith and friendship, which brought a huge

sigh of content from the bottom of the honest fellow's heart.

"For," says he, "if we are to go amongst these Indians, I shall stand in need of a friend, lest one of 'em knows me for having married into his family without consent of the parents."

"Ask," says I, "where Lady Biddy lies, and when I shall see her."

When Matthew had put this question, the Inga pointed to the south-west; and then turning his hand towards the sun, lowered it to the horizon, to indicate that we should not overtake her before sunset. After looking around him once more searchingly, he bade Matthew be silent, and so led the way down the hillside. But for all this warning Matthew could not help communicating his thoughts to me in a low tone now and then, for he was a generous-hearted fellow in all things, and was as fond of the sound of his own voice as any starling.

"Look you, master," says he, "how gentleness does rule the world above all the craft and

cunning of the wicked; for while these sinful Portugals could not compass the ruin of an unprotected maid with all their might, one act of love on her part has brought about their overthrow, and saved us from the arrows of this Inga."

"Ay, Matthew," says I; "and if we take Lady Biddy home to her friends, 'twill be due to your mercy when I lay a prisoner in the guard-house."

"Mercy!" says he; "'twas nothing of the sort; 'twas but a yearning to hear honest English once more, for not one of my wives could I ever bring to speak it."

In this manner we whispered our thoughts when the difficulty of getting to the bottom of that vast valley did not interfere.

At length we came again down to the side of that river we had passed upon our way to Valetta; and here Matthew begged the Inga to stay awhile and eat a bit of cold roast mutton and a crust of bread with us, as we were pretty nigh spent one way and another, having taken no

food since daybreak. The Inga agreed to this, and we shared what was left of our food, and drained the wine-skin.

“Master,” says Matthew to the Inga, “are we going to cross the river?”

The Inga nodded.

“I thought as much,” says Matthew. “And we’re to swim it?”

Again the Inga nodded.

“Now should I be in a bad way but for this wine-skin,” says Matthew, “for I can swim no further than a frog may fly.”

“And how is your wine-skin to help you, friend?” says I.

He winked his roguish eye, and putting his lips to the empty skin blew into it until it was full of his breath and tight as any blown bladder.

“There,” says he, tying up the mouth, “with that in my arms I’ll kick myself to the other shore for a wager.”

CHAPTER XLIX.

MY LADY BIDDY AND I MEET AGAIN, TO OUR
JOYFUL CONTENTMENT.

ABOUT sunset (as the Inga had promised) we came to the place where his tribe were encamped, which was amidst the mountains on the further side of the river, approached by a very intricate winding way, and so encompassed with sharp high rocks that no man not acquainted with those parts might find his way thither, though he searched a life-time.

Coming through this tortuous defile to an open space, the Inga, being in advance some paces, suddenly came to a halt, and, turning to me, pointed in silence to a little rising hillock not far distant, where stood my Lady Biddy, shielding her eyes from the rays of the setting sun with her hand, and scanning the valley below.

For a moment my heart stood still, feeling as if it must burst with the great joy that flooded it. I think I must have cried aloud in my gladness (though I know not what I did), for she turned that moment like a startled doe, and came running down the hillock with her hands stretched out. So I flew to her, and we stood clasping each other's hands and gazing into each other's faces, she with a look of gladness in her face, yet a sad reproach in her eyes, as though she would ask me why I had been so long a-coming. But neither of us could say one word; so with a quick impulse, as if our two minds were but one, our silent, trembling lips drew together, and we exchanged the first kiss they had known since we were boy and girl.

This kiss was none but such as a brother and sister might have shared; 'twas not the passionate overthrow of modesty which covers a maiden's face with blushes, and makes a man's limbs to tremble under him; 'twas simply the overflowing of a sweet, innocent affection that can find no other mode of expression. After

that kiss we looked in each other's hearts with open, unwinking eyes, and hands still clasped.

"Benet," says she faintly, "how long we have been sundered!"

"Have we?" says I, leading her to a little boulder where there was room for us to sit together.

"Why, an age!" says she, with a return of her usual merry laugh. "Have you not missed me?"

"Now I come to think of it," says I, "there has been trouble in my heart; but my joy is so great to be with you again that the past seems naught but an evil dream. And 'twas no more than a dream, the worst part of it; for one while I imagined you lost beyond recovery, and another while I imagined you dead and eat up by tigers; but this is real, and no idle fancy," holding her sweet fair hand up to look at it and make sure I was not stark mad. "But," says I, dropping my voice for pity, "'tis much thinner than it was."

“Ay, I shall be a sad old witch to look at ere long,” says she; “’tis well I have no glass to spy into.”

“Trust me for a faithful mirror,” says I, “when I tell you that you never looked so sweet as now.”

Indeed, I said no more than the truth, as far as my judgment went in this matter; yet I saw that her face was not so round as of old, and her skin was rarely pale, so that her eyes looked larger, darker, and more lustrous thereby. And thinking how she must have suffered by fright and hardships to have lost flesh and blood in this sort, I was greatly moved with compassion.

“A joyful heart makes a bright face,” says she; “but what would it have been like had the Indians come back without you? What would have become of me?”

“Nay,” says I, “these Ingas would never have harmed you.”

“Is that all?” says she. “Do you think I hold your affection so lightly that I could have lived to forget you?”

Thus might our conversation have run on till she had expressed all that it was in her simple affectionate heart to say to her kinsman, but that I became silent. For the pressure of her hand and kind looks did stir my smouldering passion and fan it to a flame, so that I had much ado to restrain myself from flinging my arms about her waist and drawing her to my breast.

All the love that a warm-souled woman has for a dear brother she wished to bestow on me, but I had more than innocent love in my heart. Still, I had the sense to see that my own happiness, as well as hers, would be blighted if I let my mad desire be known, and I had also the strength to control it (God be praised!). Still, I dared not trust myself too far, and counted it best to let go her hand, and talk of other matters. So getting up, as if I would look about me, I begged her to give me an account of all that had happened to her. Whereupon she rose also, and slipping her hand through my arm walked beside me up and down that pleasant spot, in the waning twilight, telling me of her adventures;

how Lewis de Pino had told her I was gone on with the first part of the train, seeming in an ill-humour, which appeared less remarkable to Lady Biddy because I had been particularly dull the day before; how, as they went on and came not up with me, she grew alarmed, yet had no means of discovering whether Lewis de Pino had told the truth or not, and so of force went on, yet with a sinking heart; how, being brought to a stand in that narrow road in the mountain-side by the bridge being gone, they were attacked with arrows from above in such sort that the arquebusiers only succeeded in wounding one of the Ingas, and were themselves shot down one after the other till not a man was left, even to the Indian strippling who served De Pino for a page; how the Indians then coming down from above, she recognised amongst them that poor slave whom she had begged De Pino to take from her yoke; and how finally the dead Portugals, being rifled of their arms, were cast down over the precipice, the slaves liberated from their bonds, and they,

with my lady (who from first to last had been treated with the utmost respect and courtesy), led back along the mountain-path till they came to a narrow way, by which they descended to the river. Also she told me how with signs she had given the Inga girl to understand her trouble about me, which she (being of a quick wit) readily comprehended, and, bringing forward her husband with further signs, bade her know that I should be sought and brought safely to her, etc. All these particulars agreed so well with what Matthew had suggested, and I have set down, that I need not dwell upon them, but may get on at once with fresh matter.

The light faded away over the western mountains till there was naught but a faint glow beyond the dark peaks, and still we strolled up and down, discoursing to one another of our various fortunes; and so forgetful was I of my late fatigue in the delight of these moments that it did not enter my head for some time that my lady might be weary; but suddenly bethinking

myself of my selfish disregard to her comfort I begged to know if she was not weary.

“No,” says she gaily; “’tis a relief to talk again, for I was getting heart-sick of silence. But you, Benet?—men do not care to chatter as we women do.”

“Nay,” says I, “you may be sure that I shall never weary of listening till you weary of talking.” And then I ventured to tell her that I counted this the very happiest moment of my life. Upon which she gave my arm a little kindly pressure with her hand, which sent a thrill of inexpressible delight through every nerve of my being.

And so she began to gossip again as merrily as before, which was a great comfort to me, for I could have found never a word to say at this time for the tumult of joy in my heart. I would have lingered there till morning broke, feeling her hand so lightly lying on my arm, and listening to the sweet purling of her gentle voice; but presently spying Matthew, who had drawn up at a respectful distance, and stood there humming

and coughing as if he would speak with me, but dared not approach, I bethought me that I had not yet introduced the faithful fellow to Lady Biddy. So I called to him, and when he drew near, scraping and shuffling with his hat in hand, I said—

“This is Lady Biddy Fane, Matthew.”

“Your ladyship’s humble and obedient servant,” says he, with another scrape.

“My cousin has been talking about you, Matthew,” says she, offering her hand to him; “and I hope you will forgive me being so tardy in acknowledging my gratitude, for in helping him you have befriended me.”

“As for your ladyship’s gratitude,” says he, “I hope I may yet lay better claim to it; and as for tardy acknowledgment, I count you were better occupied; while as for the rest,” adds he, “I wish you joy of your sweetheart.”

At these words all the blood rushed into my face, and happy was I there was little light to reveal my confusion to Lady Biddy.

“How?” cries I angrily; “have I ever

spoken so disrespectfully of my lady that you should take the liberty to speak of me in this relation? ”

“ Lord love you, master! no,” says he ; “ but ’twas because you always spoke of her ladyship with such mighty respect that I reckoned she must be something more to you than a cousin. I meant no offence ; and, indeed,” adds he, with ready wit, “ ’twould have been but a mean compliment to her ladyship’s charms or your understanding if I had set you down for aught but her admirer.”

“ Ay,” says Lady Biddy, laughing, “ and so should I.” But I observed that she was a little more reserved towards me after this, as if she perceived the imprudence of giving expression to those her feelings of simple, innocent affection which I might take for an acknowledgment of warmer sentiment.

CHAPTER L.

WE TAKE COUNSEL OF THE INGAS AS TO OUR FUTURE, ETC.

MATTHEW'S business was to tell us that the Ingas were waiting to hold council with us. As soon as we heard this we hastened from that pleasant, retired spot where we had been strolling, as I have said, to join them, not without some self-reproach for so slighting those to whom we owed better civility ; but, to tell the truth, I had clean forgot those good Indians, for where my sweet lady stood was all the world to me, and I was indifferent to all outside it.

Coming beyond those jutting rocks which had screened us from view we perceived the Ingas' camp. They had built a fire upon the further side of a little lake, fed by a stream running from the mountains, in the midst of the hollow, and here sat a score of Indians

handling the arquebuses taken from the Portugals, and examining them by the light of the fire. At a little distance a dozen of their women were grouped together on their mats, about a pile of pack-saddles and merchandise. Hard by stood a couple of tents of rush mats, very curiously woven and stained. These objects, lit up by the dancing flames of the fire, with the deep shade of the rocks beyond, were a pleasure to see for all who love pictures of strange things; but that which gave it the finishing-touch was an Inga with his spear, who stood on a high rock, keeping guard, and cut the rising moon in two halves with his dark, handsome figure.

When the Indians spied us approaching they rose to their feet, and their captain, coming to meet us with a very noble and courtly carriage, laid his hand on my breast, and I did likewise by him, seeing this was their mode of greeting. Then the Indian woman whose life I had saved came forward and went through the same ceremony; but, this done, she slipped beside my Lady Biddy and began to fondle her hand,

stroking it gently, lifting it up to her cheek, etc., which I thought very pretty.

I begged Matthew to make my apologies to the captain for not having paid my respects to him ; but this he would not do, telling me these Ingas were a mighty touchy sort of people in trifles, and were as like as not to take an apology as an admission of wrong, and a mean trick of getting cheaply out of a mess one ought never to have got into.

“Hows’mever,” says he, “I have settled that matter by telling him that an Englishman’s first duty is to pay his services to the females of his tribe, and, that being done, you are now at liberty to devote all your attention to him.”

In this matter it seemed to me Matthew showed more sense than I or many better cultivated men, who never meet without some paltry excuse or other.

The Indians meanwhile led us to the tent, where a supper had been laid out on a mat, and insisted very civilly on our eating before entering upon business ; then they withdrew to

their place by the fire, where a space was left in their midst for us, every man smoking tobacco, for I believe there is no people in the world so given to the use of this herb.

When we had finished our meal, we escorted Lady Biddy to the second tent, which had been given for her use, Matthew telling us that the Indians never speak of their affairs before the sex. "Though why not," says he, "I cannot say, except it be that their females are given over-much to talk, which leads to blabbing of secrets."

Lady Biddy retained us a minute at the entrance to her tent to show how Wangapona, her Indian friend, had decked the floor with soft blooms of flowers, and bound knots of bright feathers to the head and foot of the net which served as her bed; also placing for her use a bowl of fresh water, in which floated certain fruits to give it flavour and sweetness. Then bidding each other farewell, with a fervent wish that we might sleep peacefully, we separated; but she did not again offer to let me kiss her.

Coming to the fire with Matthew, we sat

down with the Indians, and accepted of their tobacco-sticks, which they call zigaroes; and now, all smoking like so many chimneys, the chief spoke to the matter in hand, every one listening in solemn silence. And first of all he bade Matthew tell me that every enemy of the Portugals and Spaniards was regarded by them as a friend.

“Ay,” says the chief, in his tongue, “we spare the lives of those serpents and jagoaretes that haunt the woods they hunt, and pray to our god, the Sun, not to dry up the festering marshes that poison the air they breathe, but to nourish with his rays all venomous fruits that they may eat, all loathsome reptiles whose fangs and stings may taint their blood, and to give strength to those beasts who tear their flesh and break their bones.

“Our forefathers,” he goes on, “were mighty kings, and the meanest of our people lived in palaces, to which the richest abodes of these accursed Portugals are but dens and hovels. Our people spurned under their feet the gold

for which our enemies sell their souls. Our men were wise ; our women were faithful ; our children were obedient : all were happy. Then came this troop of ravening jagoaretes into our slumbering camp. Jagoaretes ! Nay, 'tis an insult to the divine Sun to compare the basest beast he has fashioned to a Portugal. The jagoarete kills ; he does not yoke our warriors with oxen and scar their backs with whips ; he does not put chains upon our hopeful boys and doom them to lifelong pain ; he does not force our innocent maids to bear a race of slaves."

"Lord love us, master," says Matthew, after translating this to me, "I hope he isn't going to make a capital offence of this trifle."

"We are unhappy," continues the Inga, sinking his voice to a tone of mournful sadness. "Who can laugh in the still night? The very flowers hang their heads: in the morning you will find tears in their eyes. Our sun has sunk. Will it ever rise again?"

"Ay, that it will, I warrant," says Matthew to him stoutly.

The Indians held up their hands as a warning not to interrupt the chief.

“ They are numberless as chesketaws* on the lagoons; they suck our blood like vampires in the night; we have no arms against them. We are scattered over the land like leaves after a tornado. Thus scattered, what can we do against our clustering enemies? We are hunted into the mountains and the desert; but even there our homes are not safe. The world is too small to give refuge to the Inga. There is no limit to the envious greed of our enemies; no bounds to their cruel spite. They want gold, but they will not buy it of us, for that would give us power and the means to live. They would not have a single Inga free, but all should be their slaves, to wear yokes and chains, and toil for them without hope. Is it all darkness?” says he piteously, looking round him; “ is there no hope? Yes,” cries he, facing the moon and stretching up his arms; “ while the bride smiles, her god lives; and

* The chesketaw is a venomous fly like the musketaw, but bigger and more poisonous.—B. P.

the moon's god is our god—the great father of all.”

With this he slowly sank into his place upon the mat, saying never another word; and thus ended his speech, which seemed to me very fine for such as he to deliver.

After a few minutes' silence, given in respect to the chief, that his words might be duly digested, another Inga rose and spoke, and his speech was more practical and to the purpose. He said the tribe bore us a great affection, not only because we were enemies to the Portugals, but also because in the face of that foe I had dared to strike up the musket levelled at the breast of Wangapona. As our true friends, they were prepared to give more consideration to our wishes than to their own, and therefore the first thing they wished to know was in what manner they might serve us.

I told Matthew to ask if they could give us an idea of our position with regard to the sea; upon which the chief, taking a stick of wood, spread out the ashes of the fire in a plain to

represent the face of the earth; then, with a handful of ashes, he built up a very fair presentment of the mountains, and after that traced furrows to show the course of rivers. That river we had crossed he called the Attrato, and another still a good distance to the west of the mountains where we lay he called the Cauca, and one yet further west the Magdalena (though he had another name for it), which joins the Cauca at some distance from its disembogement. He also showed another stream rising from the mountains called the Meta, and this he assured us flowed into the Baraquan or Oronoque, though his knowledge of the country in that part was limited to hearsay.

“Now, Matthew,” says I, “what are we to do? Our nearest way to the coast will be to follow the Cauca and get into the Magdalena, which flows into the sea somewhere about Cartagena.”

“Ay,” says he, “but we must know if we are likely to flow with it into the hands of the Portugals.”

To his question on this subject the Ingas replied that the whole of that coast was overrun with Portugals, who had, besides, several settlements on the Magdalena. They offered to guide us as far as they might go in safety, but could give us no encouragement of escaping our enemies.

“Then,” says I, “we must strike out for the Meta, and so get to the Baraquan, where I doubt if any Portugals are to be met with.”

The Ingas said they had heard of no enemies save certain tribes of hostile Indians on the Baraquan, and promised to guide us to the Meta, which they counted was a three-weeks’ journey.

“If we take three weeks to get to the embers,” says Matthew, regarding the plan of ashes, “Lord only knows when we shall get t’other side of the fire.”

While we were discussing this difficulty, the Indians argued upon the possibility of descending the Meta.

“It seems to be a plaguy difficult job, master, even to these fellows, who are used to travelling

those parts," says Matthew. "The open country is impassable by reason of the woods; and the river is not much better travelling, by reason of divers cataracts, lakes, and blind inlets, where one may be lost as in a maze, to say nothing of one part where we must go an hundred miles out of our way to avoid a race of hungry cannibals."

"Ask them," says I, "if they can offer any alternative by which we may come to our friends."

Upon this question a great discussion ensued, in which Matthew took part.

"Well, Matthew," says I, growing impatient, "what is it all about?"

"To begin with, master," says he, "when I told them we wished to join our friends, they put the very pertinent question, 'Where are they?' That was a poser. Hows'mever, for the glory of our country, I replied that Englishmen were to be found pretty nearly everywhere, especially where they are not wanted. At present, I told 'em, we were pretty well occupied in sweeping the seas of the Portugals, that we had

made a very good beginning, and that when we had finished that business we should undoubtedly step ashore and turn them out of Guiana. But as we did not wish to wait here till then, we should take it as a kindness if they would put us in the way of getting to some part of the coast where there were no Portugals, and we might keep a smart look-out for a passing vessel of our own people.”

“Was that the whole subject of discussion?” says I, when he paused.

“No, master. They don’t doubt anything I said, and are ready to believe that our ships are as plentiful in the seas as herrings. But herrings are not always to be caught when they are wanted, and the possibility of our having to wait on the shore a week before being picked up by a passing Englishman lays open the difficulty of finding any spot on the coast where we are not likely to be picked up first by a passing Portugal. The west and north coasts are to be put out of the question. The only coast that may be safe is that which they know nothing about, to be reached

only by the Baraquan, of which they know as little."

"Then all this talk has resulted in nothing?" says I.

"No, master, it has not, but the subject will have to be sifted out by us slowly; and so I will let them know that we will give their proposal the consideration it deserves, and promise them our decision in the morning."

The reply he gave evidently pleased the Ingas, who, bidding us good-night after their fashion, lay down to sleep, while Matthew and I strolled in the moonlight to consider the proposal they had made.

CHAPTER LI.

MATTHEW AND I CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION, BUT
WITH SMALL PROFIT.

“MASTER,” begins Matthew, “the Ingas would have us go to their village, which lies, as I take it, among the mountains to the west, nigh that river Meta they have spoken about.”

“There need be no hesitation in agreeing to that,” says I; “for whether we resolve to make for the north sea-board or the west, this village lies all in our way.”

“You are in the right,” says he; “but they would have us stay there.”

“That needs no consideration neither,” says I; “for we have no mind to become Ingas.”

“Not so fast, master; hear me out,” says he. “They would have us stay there until they have drawn together their scattered people in such

force as we may assault the Portugals, and take one of their ports."

"That is easier said than done, Matthew."

"Ay," says he; "like descending the Baraquan, but with this difference—that in attacking a town we can ascertain pretty fairly what opposition we shall have to encounter, and what force we have to overcome it; while in t'other affair there's no knowing what obstacle may stand in our way, or what accidents of sickness and the like may happen to enfeeble us. Look you, master, the furthest an Englishman has penetrated into Guiana by the Oronoque is a matter of thirty or forty leagues, and that with the succour of lusty fellows well armed with boats and stores; now, what we two men, with no arms but what we can beg of the Ingas, and no stores but what we may carry on our backs, propose to compass is a journey through that same Guiana by untrodden ways and broken waters—a distance of three or four hundred leagues, as I reckon; and with a female, remember. Likewise I would have you reflect

that ere we are many months on our way, we shall be overtaken by the rains, when we must seek high ground, or be swept away by the floods and torrents that pour through the valleys. For you and me a month or two of misery, more or less, may count for nothing; but how is the female to stand it, with not a dry thread to her back, and, as like as not, never a bit of shoe to her foot?"

This perspective was terrible enough, and yet, as I saw, not overdrawn, but indeed favourable in comparison with the image that presented itself to my mind, of my poor lady falling sick under the hardships of privation, and having no shelter but chilly rocks, no remedy, no comfort, nor any hand to render those services which a woman can only receive from a woman, etc.

"Now, Matthew," says I, "let me hear what you have to say in favour of t'other venture, for I see which song your voice is most in tune for."

"I will say what I think, master," says he, showing greater patience with me than I with

him, "for I have no wish you should count me wiser or more foolish than I am. Yet that you may not be disinclined to the Ingas' design by thinking my wishes lead me to set it out in a fairer light than it deserves, I must tell you that I have no relish for meddling with the Portugals. I have seen enough of 'em to satisfy my stomach to the last day of my life, and would rather end my days in a wilderness than under the walls of a town. Anyhow, master, I will try to let you see their project as they laid it out to me. This tribe numbers about a hundred men and boys; females count for nothing. Ten of their number will be left with us in the village; the rest will go out to rouse up other tribes and bring them to their purpose. They will take with them the Portugals' muskets, as a proof of what they have done, and I warrant it will count for something in their inducement that they have for allies a couple of Englishmen who are accustomed to whipping Portugals; for it is certainly to the knowledge of these Indians that we beat them out of Cartagena in years gone by."

“How many Indians do they think to muster in this business?”

“Betwixt three and four hundred, according to the general opinion, and that within a month.”

“Say they gather together all that they hope for,” says I, “what can a band of naked savages do against a town fortified with guns and defended by trained soldiery, Matthew?”

“In the first place, master, let me tell you, ’tis no inconvenience to fight without clothes in these parts. As for their guns, I doubt if they will ever get a chance of firing at us. We shall take the town by surprise, for these Ingas know how to march easily through the woods by ways unknown to the Portugals. Against the trained soldiery we shall bring ten arquebuses, with good account, I’ll answer for it, with galore of bows, blow-guns, and pikes, all wielded by fellows who are fighting for liberty and life.”

“Supposing we carry the town, as very probably we may, what then? Unless every soul in the place is massacred the news must be

carried to the Portugals, who will lose no time in sending ships and men to recover it. Supposing the Ingas can withstand an assault, how long can they hold out against an organised siege?"

"Why, that's their look-out," says Matthew. "What we have at heart is getting out of Guiana, and it will be odd indeed if we can't get some sort of craft to bear us thence ere the Portugals come down to lay siege to the place."

"What," says I, "would you desert the Ingas after leading 'em into this pitfall?"

"Nay," says he, "'tis their own wish to go there, and they know full well we have no wish to stay."

"Ay," says I; "but did you warn them of the vengeance the Portugals will certainly take? No! On the other hand, with your prating of our prowess on the sea, and the multitude of our ships, and drubbings in store for the Portugals, you may have led them to believe that we should come back with ships and men to help them, which can never be while we stand at peace with the Portugal."

Matthew scratched his head in silence for a minute, and then says he—

“ ’Twould be a scurvy trick to leave the poor fellows to fight the next battle alone, and that’s a fact. If they could only hold their own—or anybody else’s.”

“ But they cannot, so we must set our face against their design.”

“ I don’t mind standing by ’em, master, if you’re minded to let me take the responsibility of this business on my own shoulders. I warrant there’s not a soul alive in England who remembers me, or would care to see me again.”

“ And what would become of you, my poor fellow ? ” says I, touched by the sadness of his speech. “ Do you think you could hold the town against the Portugals ? ”

“ No,” says he ; “ but I wager I’d thin down the rascals before they took it from me.”

“ Come,” says I, “ let us think of something else, for you must know this can never be.”

So I turned my thoughts to the Baraquan.

and gloomy enough they were, so that I had not a word to say ; but Matthew, though his hopes were dashed, still revolved the Ingas and their design in his mind, as it appeared, for presently, breaking silence, he says—

“ I had no notion these Ingas were such a fine set of fellows, which only proves once again that we should never judge of a flock of sheep by the ewes in the pen.”

“ Why,” says I, “ did you not find your wives amiable and kind ? ”

“ Ay,” says he ; “ but what does a man want of such trumpery as amiability and kindness ? ” (As I have tried to show, he was himself remarkable for these qualities.) “ Can you tell me anything about these Ingas, master, for I am no schollard ? ”

“ Nor I neither, Matthew,” says I. “ I know no more of these people than what I have learnt from you and my own limited observation.”

“ You know enough to perceive they are better than the common ruck of mankind, I

warrant," says he, "for they have the bearing and proud carriage of a noble race not used to base practices. For my own part I feel I could trust 'em with my life—as long as they learn nothing to my discredit."

"Ay," says I, "they do seem, as you say, a noble race of men."

"Then what a thousand pities it is," says he, "that they should be hunted from their homes, and worried to death by such a pack of dirty dogs as these Portugals."

I made no reply. Nor did he continue his theme for some time, but strolled beside me in silence, which was odd in him, who was wont to utter his thoughts as they came into his head. Yet I perceived his mind was still occupied, for, taking off his hat for the greater convenience of scratching his head, he would now and again give his thigh a slap with it, muttering occasionally betwixt his teeth, though I could catch no words but "dirty dogs of Portugals," and the like.

CHAPTER LII.

MATTHEW LAYS OUT A SCHEME FOR STAYING FIVE
YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS.

“WHAT a plague it is, master,” says Matthew presently—“what a plague it is for a man who has no learning to get a good notion in his mind. Here am I like a young blackbird who feels he has the makings of a sweet song in his head, and yet can do no more than squeak out of tune !”

“Nay, then,” says I, “do as the blackbird does—strive to sing, and I warrant the tune will come in time.”

“Well, master,” says he, “to begin with, do you not think these Ingas, if they gathered together and made head against the Portugals, might recover themselves some little corner of their territory, where they could live in peace like Christians, and trade with other nations ?”

“The difficulty is,” says I, “to get them to

combine steadfastly for any length of time, for, according to their own showing, they are divided into a hundred tribes, each more or less hostile to the other."

"Why," says he, "that is but the outcome of their misfortunes, for no men are so snappish as those who suffer continual persecution. Do think how ill-tempered and cross-grained a wife will be who has a tyrant for a husband, and how buxom and cheerful she is whose spouse is kind. These poor fellows are fighting for their lives. The Portugals will not trade with them, or suffer others to traffic, so that they get no comfort, and are forced to seek subsistence in the woods ; then if one finds a good cover of game he must hold it against others in order that he may exist."

"All that is very true," says I ; "but how can their case be remedied ? "

"By such economy as is practised among people who have not half their resources. What would become of our peasants, master, if they lived only on what they could find in the woods? Now if these Ingas pitched upon a fertile

and healthy valley beyond the range of the Portugals, they might enclose fields and breed creatures for their food ; they might till the ground and grow proper fruits and grain, so that they would no longer have to go far afield for game and fight their brethren to hold it."

"And how would you have them till the ground when they have no iron ploughshares?"

"As for that, master," says he, "I have seen the earth tilled with a stick in Cornwall; but these might make ploughshares of gold if they were so minded."

I laughed at this notion, but bade him go on, seeing this objection was but a trifle.

"Well, master," says he, "I take it, they must have more comfort by this way of living than they now can get; and other tribes, seeing their state, would willingly enough come to partake their contentment. There would still be much lacking to their estate; but by laying their plans carefully, and preparing themselves with arms and leaders, they might in the end take some port from the Portugals, where the

country about would give them protection against assault, and so come about to open trade with any nation who wished to take their commodity in exchange for what the Ingas need."

"Hold, Matthew," says I, "what commodity have these Ingas to dispose of?"

"Lord love you, master," says he, "they have that which no nation ever yet refused—gold! The Ingas, with their knowledge of these mountains, could easily produce you gold by the bushel; while the Portugals, with pain, get it by the thimbleful. And look you, master, once the traders know where they can get gold cheap, they will take means to prevent the Portugals again closing that port. The project may seem wild at the first glance, as many another achievement has looked in the beginning, but is it impossible?"

"It is not impossible," says I; "but the Ingas must be taught."

"To be sure, master. And they are willing enough to learn. All they need is a leader, as

appears clearly from their seeking our help against the Portugals."

"Ay," says I, "but where is the teacher to be found?"

"Not a great way off, master. In a word," says he, "you are the man who may save thousands from destruction by the Portugals, and raise up these poor Ingas from misery and despair to happiness and prosperity."

This proposal did fairly take away my breath, and ere it came again for me to speak, Matthew continues—"When I tell the Ingas that you refuse to save yourself by the means they suggest, because they could not hold the town and would suffer disaster, they must needs regard you with respect and admiration, for the virtues they do most prize are sagacity and generosity. Thus will they be well disposed to listen to a scheme for their surer advantage, especially when they know that you will not leave them until they are in a condition to maintain the independence of the state you have set up."

"And how long do you reckon it will

take to carry out your project, Matthew?" says I.

"Why, master, I count we may do a good deal in four or five years."

"Five years!" says I, with a gasp.

"Ay, master; but that's not half the time it would take to get down the Oronoque. And what are five years when you are happily and profitably occupied? Will it not be a great joy to you to know that you are redeeming these poor folks?"

"Ay, to be sure," says I; "but Lady Biddy?" For she had been in my mind all this time.

"Why, master, I mistake her ladyship if she is the sort to sit down and cry for farthingales in the midst of wild woods. No, I do rather count upon her entering cheerfully into this business, and teaching the women, as you teach the men, with a good result for her pains, and the blessing of every wife and mother that wears a tawny skin."

"Ay," says I, "they could not fail to be happier for her tenderness."

“No, master, nor she for having such scope for her tenderness. There’s many a thing I might teach ’em, for I have earned wages as a blacksmith and a carpenter in my time. And if lords, as I have heard, do live to get drunk, to hunt, and to go gallanting, then may you live here like the best of ’em; for,” says he, dropping into his customary vein of humour, “you may have a score of sweethearts, and not a man to say you nay; hunt without fear of trespassing on another lord’s preserves; and ’twill be odd if amongst the blessings of civilisation we cannot make up some sort of liquor to get drunk on.”

CHAPTER LIII.

MY CONSCIENCE GETS THE BETTER OF DESIRE, AND
A BIRD BRINGS GREAT JOY TO MY DEAR LADY.

“MASTER,” says Matthew, “let us try and snatch a wink of sleep, for ’tis late, and the Ingas are early risers. Moreover, we shall do well to see how this design appears in the daylight, for I have known many a scheme that wore an excellent complexion over-night—like certain females—not worth two straws in the morning. Indeed,” adds he, “we might with advantage keep this business to ourselves and say not a word of it to any one until we know these Ingas better, and judge whether they be ripe enough or too far gone for preservation.”

I could but agree with him in this prudent suggestion, and so we bade each other good-night, and laid ourselves down in a pleasant spot.

But I could not close an eye all the night for considering of this mighty project, and the more I thought about it the more I liked it. Yet was I not so blind but that I perceived the difficulties which lay in the way of one man raising a down-trodden and helpless people into a body of such force as to overthrow the Portugals and hold their own hereafter. I knew I was only an ordinary man, with no special aptitude for governing men ; nevertheless I thought that, with Lady Biddy at hand to temper my judgment with her practical good sense, I might yet manage to come out of this business pretty well in the end.

And so all through the night I lay revolving my plans for the future without perceiving the folly of them any more than if I had been reasonably sleeping and these thoughts had taken the form of a dream.

As soon as the Ingas began to stir I roused up Matthew, who was so heavy with sleep that I believe he would have willingly abandoned his scheme of regenerating the Indians on the

moment for the sake of another five minutes' doze, and bade him let our friends know at once that we could have nothing to do with their plan of attacking the Portugals.

"Nay," says he, "I'll hold my tongue on that matter until we have decided upon t'other; they will more readily believe in your wisdom if they see you are not in a hurry."

If I had taken these words to heart I might have seen what a fool I was; for here had I settled to take upon myself the most serious responsibility with rather less hesitation than I should have given to swallowing a toadstool.

We journeyed all that day and the next through the mountains, coming a little before nightfall within sight of the river Cauca; but we were still at a prodigious height, so that we were forced to rest there again.

An Inga pointed down to a part of the valley where their village lay, but we could see nothing of it for the woods that lay everywhere about like a thick mat. The sight of these vast unbroken woods took me aback somewhat, for my

imagination had figured some gentle grassy slope that would serve as pasturage for our cattle; and Matthew seemed likewise to have fostered a pleasing hope of open country, for turning to me, with a rueful look in his honest face and round eyes, he says—

“Master, I perceive we shall have to go a-felling trees.”

“We shall see,” says I, putting on an air of indifference; “from this point, to be sure, the land looks somewhat encumbered” (he nodded assent), “but we may find elsewhere a space where there are not so many trees.”

“I hope to God we may, master,” says he, “for, besides that, these trees are mighty big, and most of ’em like any iron and brass for toughness; I doubt if the Ingas have ever a saw or a hatchet to lay our hands to.”

We turned away in silence, and I think Matthew was nothing loth to set the subject aside and go to sleep in quiet and peace, for I had kept him awake all the night before laying out my schemes, consulting him as to the building

of houses, the digging of water-courses, the setting up of smithies, workshops, and the like—indeed, my enthusiasm bore me along to such lengths that towards daybreak I got naught but grunts in reply to my questions, for the fellow, though he continued to keep his body in a sitting posture, could no longer manage to resist sleep. Nor had I grown cool upon this business during the day, but whenever occasion offered to talk with Matthew privily, I pursued the same theme, so that I do truly believe there was nothing left unsaid. Wherefore, as I say, he was in nowise put out by my present silence, but hied him to a remote place where he might lie at full length and sleep with his ears shut.

Going back with the Ingas to where the tents had been set up, we were met by Lady Biddy and Wangapona, who held her hand. The girl ran to her husband's side, and I, taking my lady, led her to the point that overlooked the valley. On the way she laughed merrily as she told me of her endeavour to learn a few Indian words from Wangapona; but being come there

she became of a sudden silent, and looked over that immense sweep of wilderness that stretched from our feet right down to the river, and then up to the mighty mountains beyond, in wondrous admiration. And when she spoke, her voice was awed to a low tone.

“How magnificently grand it is, Benet,” says she, “and yet how melancholy! These mountains and forests—so old, so vast, so silent—seem to reproach us for spending our little life so lightly.”

“Is the reproach merited?” says I; “are we right to spend our lives lightly?” Here I thought was a fitting place to break our great scheme to her.

“Nay,” says she; “I cannot think it wrong to employ the faculties that are given us for our enjoyment. You would not tear the wings from a butterfly because it is less laborious than the worm that creeps!” Then, turning her wondering eyes over that vast wilderness, she adds sadly, “Sure, these wilds are not for men to live in.”

“The Ingas live in the midst of it,” says I, pointing down into the valley.

“Then shame on those who have forced them to such an existence,” says she, for I had told her how the Portugals had driven them from their cities. Then, with a tender sigh, “Poor souls!” says she, “*no wonder they never laugh.* The stillness of these mountains and the sadness of the woods have filled their hearts.”

These words went home to my conscience; and just as a soap-bubble at the slightest touch will burst—its perfect shape and bright colours, that were a delight to the eye, disappearing in an instant, leaving naught behind but the drop of murky water from which it sprang—so did all those fine colourable hopes in which I had joyed for two whole days and nights vanish quite away at this prick, giving me to contemplate the selfish paltry motive that gave 'em birth.

I took my lady in silence back to the tent, and, having bidden her good-night, I hied me again in great dejection to the rock, whence the valley looked now more gloomy and awesome

than before, for the creeping darkness; and there sitting down I took myself bitterly to task. For I did now plainly discern that I had been cheating and deceiving myself with false pretences, of the design to cheating and deceiving my dear Lady Biddy after. Why had I leapt so readily at Matthew's scheme? Not for the sake of the unhappy Ingas, but for my own delight; not because a generous emotion moved me to rescue them from the Portugals, but because of a base and selfish desire to keep Lady Biddy in the wilderness, sundered from her friends and companions by necessity; not to advance the welfare of others, but to stave off the inevitable moment when my lady and I must part for ever. Nor could I excuse myself by pleading ignorance of any harmful intention, for surely I must have felt in my heart that this design was not to my lady's advantage, since I had not dared to mention one word of it to her. That in itself was enough to convict me of wickedness.

Looking down into the valley, which had now become a black, unfathomable gulf, I

repeated Lady Biddy's words—"These wilds are not for men to live in;" and then again, "Would you tear the wings from a butterfly?" and after that, "Poor souls! no wonder they never laugh." And each phrase was a reproach that did stab my heart like an avenging knife; for I had (in my design) doomed her whom I loved to dwell in this gloom. I had meditated robbing her of all the cheerful delights of youth and liberty. I had planned to silence her merry laughter, and overcast that bright young face with the wan cast of grief and despair.

"Nay," says I, springing up, "I will stay not a day longer in these wilds than I can help. We will go hence. What matter how perilous and wearisome the way if she have hope to strengthen her heart? With God's help I will comfort her pillow every night with some prospect of better fortune on the morrow."

Just at that moment I heard in the woods below the cry of a bird that had often filled Sir Harry and me with amazement and delight (which bird I have since heard called by the

Ingas *Arara*), and this put me in mind how I might dispel from my lady's mind those gloomy thoughts inspired by the sight of the valley; so coming to her tent I scratched gently on one of the mats to know if she were asleep, as I did use to do when we were imprisoned on the pirate ship.

“Is that you, Benet?” says she from within.

“Ay,” says I; “if it be not too great trouble, do come hither and listen.”

So presently she came out, and no sooner had she stood still listening a minute, but she cries, in a trembling voice—

“Oh, Benet, 'tis the bell of Falmouth church—hark!”

We stood quite silent again, and there came faintly to our ears, “Dong, dong—dong, dong—dong, dong!” to which we listened till it ceased and came no more.

“What is it, Benet?” says she, not louder than a whisper.

“'Tis but a bird,” says I; “but I take it Providence hath winged it hither for a promise

and sign that ere long you shall hear Falmouth bells again."

"Oh ! Benet, Benet," says she, choking with tears of joy, "how good you are !" and with that she pressed my hand and went back to her tent.

"God grant that I be worthier of such esteem," says I to myself in passion.

CHAPTER LIV.

WE PART COMPANY WITH OUR RIGHT GOOD FRIEND
PENNYFARDEN, TO OUR COMMON SORROW.

IN the morning I told Matthew that I had resolved to abandon my design of staying amongst the Ingas, which he assured me he was heartily glad to hear.

“For,” says he, “the more you have praised the scheme and enlarged upon it, the more difficulties and dangers I have perceived, till, to tell you the truth, I have more than once wished myself at Gilkicker before I ever put such a notion into your head. For look you, master, a man may be thrown from his horse in a twinkling, but it takes him a plaguy long time to catch the steed and get up in the saddle again. Whereby, if these Ingas have been a matter of a century or two sinking into their present condition, we may safely argue that we should be

pretty old before we restored them to their former estate. In the meanwhile, as it seems to be the fashion all the world over to cut your king's head off as soon as he grows tiresome, we should have stood in a fair way to go to the block whenever we ventured to improve the condition of our people. You will say that this is a trifling matter to a man under the sacred call of duty (though for my own part I'd as soon have my head cut off with a knife as die abed of a colic), yet it won't do to be carried away by our own views of pleasure: we must consider, as doubtless you have, that we have a female on our hands, and ought to avoid placing her in an awkward position."

I believe the fellow would have run on in this fashion half an hour; but cutting him short, I bade him tell the Ingas at once of our decision, and this he presently did.

They heard him out patiently, but whether they were cast down or not by our refusal to join in their enterprise we could not judge, for they suffer themselves to betray no sentiment

which may detract from their manhood, and count all expressions of joy and sorrow as a weakness only fit for women and children. And it seems they do in all things shape their conduct (as far as they may) in keeping with the carriage of their god, the Sun; for when Matthew told them we hoped our refusal would not hinder them from putting us on our way to reach the Baraquan, the chief replied that they had given their promise to do so, and would not go from their word.

“For,” says he, lifting his hand, “does the Sun cease to complete his course because of a chilling cloud? He gets to his height, and the clouds part; he goes his way and looks back kindly on the golden streak which was an inky cloud. Should we be worthy children to disregard our father’s teaching?”

“This is well for us,” says Matthew, when he had translated this speech; “for if these fellows, instead of following their deity were guided by their devil—as are nine-tenths of the rest of humanity—we should be in a pretty pickle.”

We reached the Ingas' village about midday, which was naught but a barren piece of ground fenced about with stakes at a little distance from the river, and screened from observation by a thick growth of trees and bushes. Their nets hung between trees, and half a dozen canoas lay ready to be carried to the water. These, with a beggarly account of pots and vessels made of gourds, constituted all their belongings.

The men met each other with forced composure, the victors showing no sign of triumph, and those of the village none of envy, and yet it was clear to see as they handled the arquebuses, examined the stores carried by the mules, and regarded the captured slaves and ourselves, that they regarded this foray as no small matter. Until the men had done talking together, the women stood apart in silence, not daring to approach their lords before they were bidden; but it was touching to see how they stood there, taking no heed of us or of each other, but watching their men with eager, loving eyes, ready to dart forward at the first permitting signal.

“How do they justify this treatment of their women, Matthew?” says I. “The Sun shines on men and women alike; but here the poor souls are left in the shade.”

“Their turn will come,” says he; “and ’tis clear by the faces of the women that they are loved. As for justification, I have no doubt they will tell you that the Sun touches first the mountain-tops, and descends afterwards to the little hills; and for that matter—with all respect to your ladyship” (giving a scrape to Lady Biddy)—“I doubt if the females have any reason to complain; for I have observed that those who dwell in high places, though they get more observation and admiration than others do, have but a chilly time of it, while they who hold a moderate height enjoy an agreeable warmth. Hows’mever,” says he, “let us leave ’em to themselves awhile, for I see they are going to hold a council, and we shall do well to lay our heads together likewise.”

I had not left my Lady Biddy’s side in descending the mountain, but Matthew had

walked three parts of the way conversing with the Ingas, and for the fourth part had fallen behind us and walked in silence, whence I gathered there was something weighty on his mind. And so it presently appeared, for as soon as we were seated together on that part of the enclosure where the canoas lay, he began as follows:—

“I have been questioning the Ingas, your ladyship, about getting down the Oronoque,” says he, “and it seems to me a more hopeful business than when we first looked at it, thanks be to God. If I have not been quite so chatty as I am used to be, and look a little bit chop-fallen at this present, I do beg you to believe it is not by reason of anything the Ingas have told me, but on another account. When you reach the River Meta they will obtain a canoa from a friendly tribe that dwells there, and furnish you with store of things necessary to your journey; and also, by means of cut sticks, which pass among them for letters, they will give you the means of securing help from other tribes that

you may meet with. And with their help I doubt not but you will come safe to the mouth of the Oronoque."

"But, Matthew," says I, "you speak as if you were not coming with us. Have you the heart to leave us after sharing our fortunes thus far?"

"Lord love you, master, no. I haven't the heart to leave you, and that's the fact," says he, with a wry face and a scratch of his head. "There's nothing in the world would please me better than to go this journey with you, for I do love you with all my soul. But the best things in this world are put here for us to look at and not to have, and we must put up with what we can get, and be grateful to Providence it's no worse. 'Tis in this way, your ladyship. At the mouth of the Oronoque you would be as badly off as you are here, if there was no one there to meet you; nay, worse, for here you have friends, and there you would stand a chance of finding naught but enemies, wherefore I design to go down this river to Cartagena, or elsewhere, as

may be expedient, and thence go in quest of your uncle, that he may come up the Oronoque to meet you. 'Tis but a chance that I find him, to be sure ; yet help of some kind I will bring to you by hook or by crook, I warrant, and certain am I that I may serve you better in this manner than in any other, or I could not screw up my courage to part."

"Nay," says Lady Biddy, "why should we part? Cannot we all descend to Cartagena?"

"No, your ladyship," says he, with a rueful shake of his head. "Your face marks you out for observation ; your speech would betray us, and we should be undone."

"But how can we consent to let you run a risk that we dare not encounter?" says she.

"Alone my risk is small," says he, "for, as Master Benet knows, I have a famous preservative against the touch of Portugals in certain berries that produce a distemper of my skin, which will serve my turn to a marvel at this season when pestilence is rife. I pray you, do not think of me, but only of yourself ; or if

your generous disposition will not suffer that, then think of your poor uncle and friends, to whom your absence must be torture, and so let me go my way without further discussion."

However, we could not thus suddenly agree to his project, and racked our invention to devise some better expedient; but there was none, and so were we forced at length to yield to his going, but with bitter regret, for we stood in need of a friend, and sure no man was ever a more cheerful, sensible, and devoted comrade than our poor Matthew.

When the time came for him to depart, the Ingas made him a handsome present of a canoa, stored with dried flesh (which they call *buccan*), cassavy bread, etc., besides one of the Portugal's swords and a good knife; and Lady Biddy gave him a little chain she wore about her neck as a token; but I had nothing to give him, save a paltry brass tobacco-box, which I had managed to keep through all my accidents; but I do think he was as well pleased to have this as if it had been a purse of a thousand crowns.

When he pushed off from the shore into the midst of the current he waved his hat and cried to us "Farewell" very cheerily, yet I knew by my own feeling that his heart was sore. And we cried to him "Farewell" as happily as we could, but I could not see him presently for the tears that came into my eyes. "As like as not," says I to myself, "we shall never meet again."

Then Lady Biddy, seeing my dejection, slips her hand through my arm in silence, to remind me that I had yet a friend; whereupon my heart leapt from despondency to joy, and I thought, "What matters it if all the world be lost, so that this dear soul is left to me?" Yet I felt the more that night for poor Matthew, because he had no such comfort in the cheerless lonely wilds.

CHAPTER LV.

WE GO DOWN THE META, MY DEAR LADY AND I
—THE PLEASANTEST JAUNT HEART OF MAN
COULD DESIRE.

WE set out from the River Cauca with the whole tribe of those Ingas, their effects, and the captive women and spoil taken from the Portugals; for they were still minded to raise their people to carry war into the strongholds of their enemies, and counted to bring other tribes to their intent by a display of their force, and the trophies of their victory. And so in a long line, with the ablest men to the fore spying the way, we travelled painfully through the desert wilds, crossing the River Magdalena by a tolerable ford, besides many mountains and valleys of prodigious proportions; for there is no country in the world where the mountains are so high and steep, and the valleys so deep and bushy, I

do think ; and how we made our way, yet keeping a fairly true course, is a mystery to me, for one half the time we never saw the sky for the umbrage of trees, and the other half never a blade of grass for the stony barrenness of the rocks.

At the end of six weeks and three days we came to the great River Meta, which was as long again as the Ingas do usually take for that journey by reason that in many places a way had to be hewn for the passage of the mules, where the Indians might readily have slipped through in their nakedness. However, though by this delay we lost in one respect we made profit by it in another ; for not only did my Lady Biddy and I pick up enough of their words to make ourselves understood (which later on served us in good stead), but also we learnt great store of things, for want of which we might have been sorely pestered when we had no hands to help us but our own. Thus we learnt to make excellent bread from the root of the *Cassavy*—which, made properly, is as good as any loaf of wheat flour, and yet for want of proper attention may poison

you so that you die of it in an hour. Also they showed me how to make a canoa with the bark of a tree, sewn up at each end, and smeared over with the gum of *Caoutchoucona*, a most admirable natural juice, which hardens quickly, and is as water-tight as any Sweden pitch. Likewise, to our great comfort, we were shown a sweet-smelling herb called *Caccanowa*, from which issues a thin oil that no flies or insects can abide; so that by rubbing the skin therewith one may sleep all night and never once be bitten by any scorpion, moskitaw, or ant. And besides this we learnt their mode of kindling fire, which is ten times better than our fashion of striking flint and steel together; and this they do by making an engine of two pieces of cane like a child's popgun, only that the ends of these canes are open at one end and closed at the other. In the bottom of the bigger cane they put a store of powdered touch-wood; then slipping in the smaller cane, which serves as a rammer, they give it a smart blow with the hand, and this sets fire to the tinder, though as how it passes my comprehension. In

short, we picked up more knowledge of herbs, fruits, flowers, birds, beasts, and fishes, with the divers manners of rearing them, with properties of other things, their uses, etc., in those six weeks than I could describe fairly in six months, and so will I go back to my history.

Being come to the Meta, as I say, we made our way to the village of those Ingas who were friendly with ours, and there we were very well received. With them we stayed two days, during which time I showed them the use of the muskets taken from the Portugals, which I had not done before because of wasting the munitions, and in return they gave us as much information as they possessed with regard to descending the river, bidding us beware of certain falls which would certainly be our ruin unless we escaped them by drawing our boat through the woods from the upper river to the lower, and also counselling us to find a suitable shelter as soon as the rains threatened to fall; for they reckoned we could by no means hope to get down even to the Baraquan before the rainy season began.

Then they chose the largest and fittest canoa they had, and gave it us with a free heart; and in this, when we were ready to depart, they set (*imprimis*) an ample store of buccan and cassavy cakes; (2) vessels for cooking and drinking; (3) a Portugal sword and knife like those they gave to Matthew; (4) three good bows with strings to spare, an hundred arrows, and a small gourd of poison to envenom the points, which poison they do esteem and prize most highly; (5) a gourd of their tinder and two popguns, as I will call them, for kindling it; (6) two wands, very curiously wrought with carving of figures, to serve as tokens to other tribes that we were their friends and enemies to all Portugals; (7) two sleeping-nets; (8) a packet of various things, such as medicines against fevers, bites of serpents, etc., etc.; and (9) a couple of soft woven mats which these people do use for blankets. And now, when these good kind folk had nothing more to give us for our use, they came, every man, woman, and child, and laid their hands on us as a sign of love, so that our hearts ached as we got

into the canoa bidding them farewell, and the tears coursed down Lady Biddy's cheeks as she waved her hand to her little friend Wangapona, who, kneeling on the bank by the water-side, covered her face with her hands, as if she could no longer bear to watch one so dearly loved sliding down that river, away, away, never to return.

However, though I risk being deemed heartless, I must admit that this feeling of regret passed from my breast as soon as a bend of the river shut the Ingas from our perspective, and in its place sprang a sentiment of gladness and joy that I could scarce contain; for there before me sat my Lady Biddy, radiant with health and beauty, her eyes yet glittering with tears, but a gentle smile playing about her sweet cheek as hope revived her heart, and I knew that for many weeks—ay, months—we must live close together; that for long, long days every word of her dear lips must be for my ear, every smile for me, and for me only. My mind was too enchanted with the prospect of such happiness to

dwell on the blank, dreadful misery that must follow when our journey came to an end, and she was restored to her friends. "Why should I plague myself," says I to myself, "with the future when the present is all so lovely? If one is to weep to-morrow, there is more reason in smiling to-day." Yet, nevertheless, a wicked hope did secretly lie at the bottom of my heart that ere we reached our journey's end some sudden accident might put an end to both our lives.

'Twas like some pleasant summer holiday jaunt, for the river was broad and smooth, and the current just swift enough to carry us merrily onward, with no more than a stroke of the paddle now and then to keep the canoa to her course. On either hand were trees weighed down with strings of rubies and opals and amethysts, for so those twining wreaths of flowers seemed. In the pools stood wondrous herons; some saffron and rosy pink, and other some crimson red; but of the birds that started from the reeds, and those that flew over our heads, there was no end to the gorgeous tints.

About midday we became conscious of a most delicate sweet scent, and at a sudden turn of the river my dear lady clapped her hands and cried out in delight. Turning about whither her eyes were resting, I spied a wide, deep inlet of the river, where there was but slight movement of the water, all covered over with green lily leaves, dotted with blooms of creamy-white and tender pink, from which that delicate perfume issued. But how shall I tell, and yet be believed for a truthful man, of the wondrous size of these lilies? There was not a bloom that measured less than a yard about; and as for the leaves, I have seen no round table so big, for some of them did measure a good fathom and a half from side to side.

For some time we looked in amaze at this wondrous field of beauty, and then perceiving a part of that inlet very agreeably shaded with drooping palmettoes, I thought it would be a vastly proper place to rest in and eat our noon-day meal; and Lady Biddy being also of this opinion, I shoved the canoa in the very midst of

these lilies, where she was like to stay as secure as if chained to an anchor, and there we ate and drank, refreshing ourselves at the same time with the delights of this lily paradise.

When we had feasted to our hearts' content, I pushed to the shore, and, having tied one of the nets betwixt two trees, I begged my lady to repose till the heat of the day was passed.

"'Tis but changing one dream for another, Benet," says she, lying down in her net. So she lay facing the water and looking at the great moths that fluttered over the still flowers, with sweet content in her face, till her lids dropped, and she slept.

As soon as I perceived this I got up, for to gratify her wish I had made a pretence of sleeping on the herb at a little distance; and observing that this grass was exceeding fine and soft, I got my sword and mowed enough to make two good trusses, and these I took down to the canoa and bestowed them in the hinder end. Then pushing out amongst the lilies, I cut me two great leaves of like circumference, which I carried

to the shore, and there laying them on the ground back to back, I made shift, with a long thorn for a needle and some stout palmetto fibre for thread, to sew them tightly together, so that it stood on edge very well by reason of the edges being curled up all round half a foot high, and one leaf supporting the other. Then this I took down to the canoa, and setting it up crosswise therein betwixt the two trusses of grass, and further securing it by means of strings from its circumference to the hinder end of the canoa, it kept its place as well as I could wish. By the time I had finished this business my Lady Biddy awoke, and coming down to where I stood looking at my handiwork, she says, "Why, what is that for, Benet?"

"To keep the sun from your back as we go down the river," says I, "and the sun out of my eyes."

"And that soft grass is a cushion for me to sit on," says she; "sure, no one in the world is so ingenious and thoughtful as you."

But I had another purpose in view for this screen, as I put in practice that night when we

could go no further, and I anchored our canoa in a little shallow. While Lady Biddy was ashore to get some fruit she had a mind to, I set this lily-leaf screen midway in the length of the canoa, which was some twenty feet long, or thereabouts, dividing it, as you may say, into two chambers, each ten feet long, and duly screened one from another; and this screen I secured with strings, so that it could fall neither one way nor t'other. In the hinder half, which was not encumbered with our goods, I strewed one of the trusses of grass, and from the second I drew out a good soft armful that I set against the screen for a pillow.

When my lady came with a leaf full of fruit for our supper, I pointed to the provision I had made in the boat, and says I—

“There, my lady, is your bed-chamber” (indicating the hinder part), “and here is mine” (pointing to the fore part).

“That is famous,” says she with a little blush. And I think she was the more content for having been troubled in her mind before as to this matter,

as I judged from her silence. So when we had eaten our fruit, I stepped into the shallow, drew the boat hither, and helped my lady to step into her part. Then I pushed the boat out into the current, where she was anchored, and after pressing my lady's hand for a good-night, I stepped into my part of the boat and lay me down with a feeling of boundless joyful gratitude in my heart, such as I never felt there before. To think that she lay quite close to me, with naught but a lily-leaf betwixt her dear head and mine, was enough to distract my reason.

Though we had said good-night, Lady Biddy continued to chat some time, and from her cheerful, sprightly tone it was clear that she made her preparations for the night without fear; but, Lord, I do believe, had there been no screen betwixt us, she had been as secure from my observation, for I would have torn the eyes from my head rather than destroy the dainty image of virgin modesty that was hallowed in my breast.

CHAPTER LVI.

I AM PUT TO GREAT CONCERN ON ACCOUNT OF A
PORTUGAL, WHICH PRESENTLY TAKES THE
PRETTIEST TURN IMAGINABLE.

THE next morning I awoke at daybreak, but lay very still for a good hour, not to disturb my dear lady; and this time was in nowise tedious, for my head was full of glee to think that here was another day of joy before me. And also my mind was well occupied in turning over the particulars of our existence, and devising means by which I might make the day agreeable to my lady as well as joyful to myself.

Amongst other things, I thought it would not be amiss if I went a-hunting in the woods for some fresh game to replace the buccan, which is at best but an indifferent dry kind of victuals. "Moreover," thinks I, "my absence will give Lady Biddy occasion to bathe her sweet body if

she be so minded." Whereupon I cast off my mat, and stepping into the shallow, that I might not over-much joggle the canoa about, I gave myself a sluice and dressed myself."

Presently my lady, awaking, calls to me to know if it were time to rise.

"Nay," says I, "there is no hurry, for I am going a-hunting in the woods and shall not return maybe for an hour."

"You are sure you will not be back before, Benet?" says she.

"As for that," says I, "I will not stir from the place if you are afraid to be alone."

"Nay," says she, with a little laugh, "I am not afraid of that."

"Then I shall assuredly not be back for an hour," says I. "And if you are disposed to bathe, you will find the water very fresh and proper. I see no danger now, but I do beg you, ere you step in the water, to look well about you that there be no water-serpents nor cockadrils nigh."

She promised me she would be very careful;

and so with a bow and a dozen arrows away I went into the woods, as cheerful as you please. And there, after shooting at a bird with a beak as big as his body (which is called a *Tucana*) and missing him, I had the good chance to spy a *Tumandua*, which is a long-haired beast with a snout three-parts of a yard long, that feeds on the ants of the earth, which he licks up with a prodigious long tongue, like any whip-thong. I killed him with my first arrow, and having taken the skin off I cut the best parts away, packed them in a cool leaf, and left the rest behind. And now I looked about for a milk-tree such as I have spoken of, and having the good fortune to find one I gave it a couple of gashes and drew off as much as a quart of excellent good milk in a gourd I had bethought me to sling on to my waist-belt. And by the time this was done, and I had plucked some good fruits, I reckoned it was time to return to the river; so thither I made my way, stopping now and then to stuff my pockets with such dry husks of nuts as make a brisk fire, and culling a few flowers that I

thought might refresh my dear lady's senses as she ate. In this manner I charged myself pretty well: with this under one arm, that under t'other, my pockets sticking out on either side, my bow on my back, and my hands full.

But I was like to let all these things drop from me when I came to that point of the woods whence I could see the canoa, for the boat lay there empty, and nowhere could I catch a glimpse of my lady. But, to my horror, I presently spied, through an opening in the wood to my right, a Portugal (as I accounted him by his dress), fitting an arrow to his bow. I caught sight of him but for a moment, for having fitted his arrow he stole forward stealthily, as if to take his quarry by surprise, and disappeared behind a thicket. Then, as I say, was I like to have dropped all I had for amazement and terror. And now in a moment it appeared to me that my lady, having caught sight of this enemy, had fled into the wood to find me, and that, hampered by the thick growth, she had been brought to a stand, whither this wicked Portugal was stealing

upon her to take her life. Whereupon, casting everything to the ground, I rushed forward, hallooing with all my force.

“Turn, villain Portugal !” shouts I. “Here is your enemy !”

But ere I had run fifty paces I was stayed by a new amazement, for, coming to the edge of the thicket, I was brought face to face with what I had taken for a Portugal, and now found was none other than my Lady Biddy herself, but arrayed in a Portugal’s doublet and trunks like any boy.

Hearing my terrible shout, and then catching sight of me all dumbfounded with astonishment, she must needs fall into a merry laugh ; but the next moment she hung her head, blushing up to the eyes, and her knees turned in together for shame to be seen in that dress.

However, coming to herself presently, and perceiving there was no need to be ashamed of that which is done with no ill motive, she lifts up her head, though her cheek yet burned and her bright eyes twinkled, and tells me how she had begged these clothes (which had belonged to

the stripling that was page, as I have told, to Lewis de Pino) of the Ingas for her own use. And now I remembered how, at our setting out, she carried with her a packet which she put carefully in one part of the canoa, where, as may be believed, I had left it untouched.

“I shall need my gown,” says she, “when we get out of these wilds, and assuredly there would be little left of it if I tried to make my way through these woods wearing it. Now,” adds she, “I need be no plague to you, Benet, when we have to leave the river, for I can pass as readily as you through the bushes and thickets. Nay, I wish to be independent, so far as my strength will allow, that you may not fear to leave me alone if there be occasion ; and to that end I was practising with this bow, and I thought I was brave enough for anything till you frightened me out of my wits by shouting out so terribly.” And therewith she fell to laughing again ; but now she was more at her ease, perceiving that I did not regard her in any unbecoming manner.

“Your judgment is never at fault, cousin,” says I; “and sure it is more fit you should travel in this sort than in a gown which you have no means to mend when it suffered by an unseemly rent. Also ’twill be a great comfort to me to know you will not be left helpless by any accident that may happen to me.”

“We will not think of such misfortune,” says she; “but I am heartily glad you approve of what I have done; and now, to complete the improvement, do, prithee, cut my hair close with your knife.”

“Nay,” says I, “that I cannot do; you know not how pretty it is.”

“Perhaps I do,” says she sadly, and yet with a certain depth of meaning that I did not then fathom; “and so do as I beg of you; for I cannot well do it myself, and I am still woman enough to dread the thought of its being cut awry.”

“What need is there to cut it at all?” says I deplorably.

“Why,” says she, “’tis as like to catch in

the briars as my skirts, and the vexation will be greater. Besides, 'tis out of character with my dress, and I wish to feel my head as free as my limbs are. See," says she, undoing the knot and letting it fall, "how unbecoming it is to a young fellow, and what a deal of trouble it may get me into."

Here again was a hint of her meaning, yet I could not catch it then for admiring of the long waving tresses that came down to her waist, and glittered like threads of spun silk, with the colour of a chestnut just burst from its husk.

However, seeing she would take no denial, I screwed up courage to take off some of this beautiful adornment; but I would cut it no shorter than her shoulders, which I maintained was the length that pages do wear it. And I would not lose a single hair; but when the business was done I tied the long locks in a thick knot, tenderly and in silence, for my heart was sorrowing with the reflection that one day this would be all that I should have of her.

“ You are not going to keep that, Benet? ” says she, seeing what I was about.

“ Ay,” says I, “ if you will let me.” And then, not knowing any better excuse to make, I added, “ It may serve very well for fish-lines if there be any angling to do.”

Thereupon we fell to talking of fishing and hunting, as if that were the main question (though, so far as I was concerned, it was a long way therefrom), and I took her to see what I had got us in the shape of provision; and, to our content, no mischief had happened to those things by casting them down so hurriedly, for they had fallen into a tuft of grass, and the gourd of milk was unspilt. So we set about making a fire and preparing our food, all with a light and cheerful heart, as if 'twas the most natural thing in the world for my lady to be figuring in the garb of a boy. But when she was occupied with the cooking of the tumandua, I withdrew a little out of sight, under the pretence of seeing that the canoa had not shifted, and having pressed my lips and cheek to the cold

shining locks of her hair, I opened my doublet and slipped them into my breast, where I ever kept them thereafter.

And now, to make an end to this part of our history, I must say here that I think my dear lady had another and secret intent in putting on the boy's habit and cutting off her hair, which was that she might that way abate somewhat the passion of love that reigned in my heart, and was, despite my utmost endeavours to conceal it, yet visible to her eyes. She thought, as I believe, that by putting off the garb and character of her sex, I might come to regard her less as a woman, and more as a comrade of my own kind. It is not necessary to be a philosopher—it is enough to be a woman—to perceive that a man's tenderness does increase by the dependence of womankind upon his means and love; and 'twas for this reason she desired to undertake what I undertook, to overcome her weakness, and to stand alone, as one may say.

But my passion was proof against these

devices. For I could trace no action of hers to its motive without increasing my admiration and delight in the contemplation of her fine disposition. Nay, the aspect of her mind did delight my soul, as much, I truly believe, as the sight of her dear person; and she could do nothing to conceal the one or disguise the other from my searching perception. "Lord!" thinks I, when I dare not look at her, "can there be another soul so beautiful in all the world?" And then, when her eyes were elsewhere and I could regard her unseen, I would mark the dainty outline of her brow and nose, and the short upper lip that did betray her delicacy, her rounded under lip that spoke of mirth, her full, round chin, in which was no sign of weak or wanton purpose; also (with joy) how her hair that I had cut so barbarous straight did begin to curl at the end, and would sit shining on her shoulder or flutter in the soft breeze lightly by her downy cheek, like a butterfly beside a peach-plum.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE RAINY SEASON SETS IN WITH A VENGEANCE,
AND WE ARE PUT TO SORRY SHIFT TO KEEP
FROM DROWNING.

FOR five weeks we travelled down that great river, and if I set about it I could give a good account of every day; for 'twas my pleasure when I lay down at night to review the incidents of the day, since every hour did yield some precious food for rumination. Assuredly there were accidents, mishaps, and perils in that journey (as notably an assault by hostile savages, which made us mindful to trust them not thereafter); but in overcoming these difficulties and helping each other, my dear lady and I were knit more closely together, seeing that we had fared but miserably alone; and trouble, I take it, is like salt, which of itself is an abomination,

but mingled sparingly with one's daily bread does give it good savour, and serves as a zest to the appetite.

But not to weary the reader with a tedious detail of my happiness, I will cut this matter short, and come to that time when the rainy season set in, and I knew no comfort day or night for concern on my dear lady's account. And over this business I will not linger neither, for surely no one with a feeling heart will care to hear of my misery.

At first we counted that the rain would give over at the end of the day, and that we might yet go a little further before taking refuge for the season ; but we soon found our mistake, for in these parts it does not rain in showers, but comes down cats and dogs, as you may say, for spitefulness, a whole month without ceasing. So when we perceived how matters stood, having not a dry thread on us, and no means to lie down but in a bath, we resolved to stop at the next convenient spot we came to. And coming at length to a part of the river where the waters

spread out into a kind of lake, we spied, standing up out of it on its south side, a very fair high island, which I then made for, as we deemed it would be more proper to our purpose than elsewhere. And a very good sort of island we found it—about fifty acres in extent, well furnished with trees, and of a sandy soil; and we were well pleased to find abundance of holes in the higher part, which I knew at once for the burrows of acutis*, which, boiled or roast, make as good a dish as any man could have. Here, having settled to make our dwelling on the highest part of the island, as being the best drained, we drew our canoa ashore, and hauled it up thither. I say we, for my lady did haul with all her strength bravely, for she shrank from no helpful service, and well she aided me, bless her good heart!

Then, with a couple of lianas that had served us for mooring our boat, we made a shift to

* These acutis are a kind of conies that dress themselves on their hind-quarters and feed with their fore-paws in the manner of a jack-squirrel.—B. P.

slung up our canoa bottom upwards between two trees about seven feet from the ground; and, this done, we went to the water-side and cut a fair stack of cane-reeds that grew abundantly there, and with a good deal of labour carried them up to our canoa. And now we set about planting our canes the length of the canoa, but a good bit wider at the base, and inclining them in such sort that they joined at the top within the boat, so that no wet could enter that way; indeed, we set these canes so close together, and so thickly all round and about save a little opening at the leeward end for our door, that not a drop of rain came through anywhere. Thus by nightfall had we made for ourselves a very decent little cottage, which I divided in two by hanging my mat across midway of its length, in order that my lady should have a chamber to herself.

Miserable as our estate may appear to those who have never suffered adversity, and are frightened out of their wits if they be but caught in an April shower, we were, I protest, heartily

well content with our shelter, taking mighty satisfaction to ourselves because no wet leaked through our walls; that the ground, by being sandy, absorbed the water, so that there was no mud or beastliness on our floor; that, though our clothes were sodden, yet we felt no discomfort of cold, etc. Nay, we even made merry in getting our supper, because we were nearly choked by our fire of damp nuts, which set us coughing like any sick of a phthisic. But the true reason of our cheerfulness was that we were each minded to make the best of a bad job for the sake of the other, and in that way looked over the defects in our condition in spying out its advantages; and sure I am that the less we study our personal happiness, the less we find to be discontented with in our lot.

When we had been here three weeks I began to grow uneasy, for in all this time the rain had not ceased to fall, I verily believe, half an hour, whereby the waters were swelled to such a prodigious extent that more than half

our island was flooded, so that I foresaw we could not stay there above another week unless a change in the weather came about; but sign of change was there none, the rain pouring down as though it would never have done. Yet where on earth we were to go, or what to do for the best, I could no way imagine. For as our island lay under water, so did the land by the river-side. To pass afoot amidst the trees in quest of higher ground was not less impossible than to get thither with the canoa—the trees about there being as close together as nine-pins, and the water pretty nigh a couple of fathoms high amongst them.

At length, seeing my anxiety, Lady Biddy accused me of keeping a secret from her against the spirit of true friendship. Whereupon I told her of my fears, and the perplexity they threw me into.

“I did think you had this matter on your mind, Benet,” says she, “and I own I have noticed the rising of the waters with mistrust.

Indeed," adds she, "you and I are not alone in this apprehension."

"Why, who else is there here to heed such matters?" says I.

"Look," says she, pointing before her through the opening as we sat in our hut.

Casting my eyes as she directed, I noticed a troop of acutis with their heads to the ground and their ears cast back.

"They have been driven from their holes by the water," says she, "and are so subdued by fear that they have let me take them up in my arms."

"They know they are safe here; which we may take for our own assurance," says I.

"So I think," says she. "A change must come ere long. Indeed, the air feels different already."

And a change did come the very next night; but such as we had not bargained for. About midnight there broke over us the most terrific storm of thunder and lightning I ever knew, and with it the rain came down in such torrents

that I thought the weight of it must burst the lianas and bring our shelter down about our ears. This continued all the night, and I could not sleep a wink for thinking that mayhap the end of the world was at hand, and we were to be drowned by a second flood, despite the rainbow.

About daybreak Lady Biddy called to me.

“Benet,” says she, “here’s one of those poor acutis crept right into my arms.”

Upon that I sprang to my feet and went outside, fearing the worst. And there, in the half-light, the whole of the ground about me was alive with these poor acutis, all so numbed with the wet and terror that they had not the sense to move out of my way; nor did they even cry out when I trod upon them. I had not gone a score of paces when I felt the sand yielding beneath me, and caught sight of water amidst the trees.

“Cousin,” says I, running back, “we must prepare to go at once.”

“I am dressed, Benet,” says she cheerfully ;
“what can I do?”

I could not at once reply for admiring of the helpful ready character of that dear woman (thus revealed), but paused to gaze on her in wonder and love ; however, this was no time for long delay, so we presently got all the things out of the hut and placed them ready to our hand ; and then I unfastened the lianas that held up our canoa, and let it slide down to the ground. By this time it had grown light enough to see the way by which we had drawn up our canoa, and we had now but a short distance to haul it ere we reached the water. Then we stowed all our poor possessions in their place, and launched the boat amidst the trees. When it lay fairly afloat I begged my lady to get in. But she hesitated, with a mournful look behind her.

“Benet,” says she, “if it won’t make your labour of rowing more difficult, I should like to take some of those poor dear conies away. ’Tis so pitiful to leave them here to die.”

I helped her with a willing and ready heart to carry as many of the half-dead acutis to the canoa as we could take, and then we got in, and I pushed my way through the trees out into the stream

CHAPTER LVIII.

WE FIND A HAVEN OF REST IN A WONDROUS LAKE ;
BUT ARE NIGH BEING SUCKED INTO A WHIRL-
POOL.

WE swiftly left the island behind us, for this lake (as I call it), which had been pretty still when we entered it, was now hurrying along with the force of any mill-stream. The water was orange-tawny with the mud and sand it had swept up in its course, and littered all over with great trees and bushes ; and this wreck on it, with the desolation all around, and the vast extent and the mighty force of it, did strike us both with awe and a feeling of our littleness and helplessness, so that we could not speak for some time. However, we presently found some consolation in perceiving that the rain had ceased to fall, and that betwixt the black clouds was here and there a rift of blue, which was the first

we had seen of the sky for six weeks or thereabouts; and with this we grew more cheery, and even the conies began to prick their ears and nibble of some herb we had torn up for them the last thing before putting off.

My attention was soon diverted from these trifles by more serious matters; for being carried to that end of the lake whence the waters issued in a narrow passage betwixt two high rocks as through the neck of a funnel, it was with the utmost ado I kept our canoa in mid-stream and clear of those bushes and trees which, as I have said, were scattered abroad, and here by the confluence of the flood we were brought into such close quarters that at every turn the canoa was threatened to be nipped in their embrace or swept into the midst of the wreck and lumber that ground painfully against the banks, where our frail bark (as I may truly call it) would in a moment have been crushed like a thing of paper, and we with it.

To make matters worse, the course of the river was impeded by sundry huge rocks stand-

ing up here and there, which threw the stream into violent convulsions of eddies and torrents that no force of man could resist, so that one minute we faced one way, and the next another, to our great confusion and imminent peril, for out of all this trouble of rocks, bushes, trees, dead carcasses of cuacuaparas,* and the like, there was promise of a speedy end (by death) to all our troubles; and certain I am that but for the help of Providence we had never come out of these straits alive.

How long we were in this pickle, whether five minutes or five hours, I know not; but I take it few men are so plagued in eighty years. And not one instant of repose was there either for me or my dear lady (who throughout kept a cool head, and helped with one of the oars to stave off this or that floating thing as surely and stoutly as any man), for ere we were out of one danger we were into another, and destruction menacing us on all sides.

It seemed that our condition could be no

* A sort of stag, as big as any Devonshire cow.—B. P.

worse than it was ; but whilst I was laying this fool's flattery to my heart, for its encouragement, my Lady Biddy cries suddenly—

“ Hark, Benet ! What can that noise be ? ”

Then straining my ears, yet still battling with trees, rocks, etc., I caught the sound her finer ear had first detected, which was like the rushing of a great wind at a distance. This perplexed me greatly for a space, for there was but a little air stirring ; but at length, growing more used to the sound, which increased every instant, I hit upon an explanation of it which struck despair into my soul.

“ Lord help us ! ” says I, “ ’tis the cataract we were warned against by the Ingas.”

“ Oh, what is to be done ? ” says she.

“ Nay,” says I, dropping my oar, “ there is nothing to do now but to perish, dear cousin.”

But she was not minded to perish tamely thus ; and seeing we were drifting upon a tree, deftly turned her oar to my side and pushed the canoa from it, to our immediate salvation. Thus put to shame for my cowardice, I picked up my

oar and strove again vigorously to keep in clear water.

But now the roaring of that fall was grown to the loudness of thunder, and casting my eye that way I perceived a kind of cloud rising above the river, which was nothing but the vapour thrown off by the heat of this vast river in falling such a prodigious depth.

Hitherto we had striven only to keep to the middle of the river, but now I glanced to the side, for there only might we chance to escape being engulfed in the cataract; though only to be crushed amidst the tearing heaps of timber that swept the shores. To my astonishment, I saw nothing but steep rocks on either hand; for being entirely occupied in steering away from the floating masses on the river, I had taken no note of the changing character of the country we had entered. In that glance I perceived there was no escape by the sides; so that there seemed truly no way but to go down with the water into that terrible abysm.

And yet my spirits recoiled from such an

end, being stirred up to a desperate antagonism by the frightful noise of the waters, that appeared to me like the impatient roaring of some great cage of famished lions awaiting their meal.

Lady Biddy glanced round her at the same moment, and I saw no look of hope in her face. In truth, she saw no escape, for now we were come within the cold vapours of the fall, that fell on us like an autumn mist; and so she turned her face to me, and seeing naught but despair there, her sweet face lit up with a gentle smile, and she held forth her hands for me to take. Her lips moved as I clasped her dear hand, and though I could hear never a sound for the thundering of the fall now close to our ears, I knew full well that those last words were "God bless you, dear Benet!"

The thought that she must die, so beautiful and sweet, and still but in the budding season of her life, and that after enduring so much, and striving so bravely and heartily, did fire me with a very madness of revolt against Providence, which, as I wickedly conceived, had doomed this

dear girl, against all reason, justice, and mercy, to death ; so that with a furious cry I caught up my oar and struck it wildly against a rock upon which we were being carried.

The shock of this encounter bent the oar till it snapped, though it was made of the toughest wood that grows in those parts, but it saved us ; for this lusty blow turned us about from the current that was to the left of these rocks into that which sped to the right, and whereas that to the left went (not more than two fathoms off) over that mighty fall, the right passed through an opening in this rocky shore which we had not hitherto perceived, and here were we safe—at least, from destruction in that frightful fall, thanks be to God. And here could I diverge likewise one moment from the course of my history to point out the heinous folly of those who abandon themselves to despair, under the conviction that Providence has decreed their destruction, which it were useless to struggle against ; for in thus yielding they do most surely oppose the decree of Providence, which hath

given us functions expressly to preserve ourselves.

And now, I say, we were in a manner safe, for though the stream was swift and strong, much encumbered with wreckage torn from the banks, etc., and obstructed with rocks where the waters shot down with incredible force, carrying us into divers eddies and whirlpools below, yet were our ears unassailed by that fearful roar of torrents which had paralysed us. And after a while being carried through that chain of hills we came in view of a great plain, flooded over as far as the eye could reach, so that it looked like nothing but a vast sea, which flood was naught but the overflow of the River Baraquan, poured through the passage by which we had escaped the great falls. Here was there no current except on the verge of the hills, and that running gently; and as these hills ran westward we kept our canoa in the stream, hoping that it would run again into the Baraquan at a safe distance below the falls, which seemed to me the more likely because it bore towards a gap in some

reasonable high mountains hemming in the plain to the south-west.

After running about two hours, as I judge at about a league and a half to the hour, and passing through this gap, though with such diminished speed that I had to use my oar, we came into a lake of still water, about a mile across, and shut in all round with a ragged wall of crystal or silver, I know not which—only this I will answer for, that when a ray of sunlight touched them for a minute the eye was blinded by the dazzling glister. In some parts this wall of rock rose flush from the water; but elsewhere there was a little sloping ground fairly well wooded, but so flooded with the water that had streamed into this basin from the Baraquan that some of the trees on the border rose not more than four fathoms above the surface.

Issue from that lake saw I none, save by the passage we had entered; but I did not concern myself greatly on this head then, my main anxiety being to find some refuge where we might repose, for the day was drawing to a close,

not a morsel of food had passed our lips for nigh on twenty-four hours; and what with our exertion, terror, and hunger we were spent and sick.

To this end I paddled the canoa towards those rocks which rose (as I have said) sheer from the water, and by good luck we came to a craggy part on the western side which led up to a deep cavern, which, to our great comfort, we found as dry as any barn. But that which contented me as well as anything in this cavern was a great bank of dry leaves in its further extremity, the product of countless years, borne hither by the winds, which in these parts do constantly blow from the east.

"Here," thinks I, with glee—"here shall my dear lady lie warm and dry at least this night."

However, before deciding this way we made a fire of dry leaves, to be sure there was no savage beast or venomous worm hiding in the cavities; but there was no sign of any live creature having been there before us, save birds,

whereof were some empty nests in the crevices. So hither we transported the goods from our canoa, not forgetting those acutis we had brought with us; and having satisfied the cravings of nature with what broken victual we had (being more hungry than nice), we knelt down side by side with one accord, and rendered thanks to God for His mercy to us. Indeed, our hearts were full of gratitude and peace; so that when our lips had ceased to speak, our spirits were yet very still and meditative. Thus it came about that instead of setting to (as I intended) to make some sort of sleeping chamber for my gentle lady, I sat down beside her on a little knoll, and through the mouth of our cavern we watched the pink light fade out of the pearly clouds in silence.

Before I could rouse myself to an active disposition my sweet little comrade, quite overcome by the fatigue of that long day, fell asleep where she sat. First her chin drooped upon her breast, and then, inclining towards me, her shoulder rested against my side, whereupon, to give her support, I put my arm about her body, with no

unholy intent, but reverently, as any father might encircle his child. Presently she raised her head with a deep-drawn breath, and all unconscious laid her face against my breast, and so fell again into a deep slumber, with the innocent calm of a little child. And, though her pretty head was so near that I might have touched it with my lips, I did not take advantage of her unconsciousness in this way (thanks be to God), nor in any other which it would give me shame to remember, my heart being filled with an ecstasy of pure love, softened with a compassionate sorrow, that one of her sex and condition should be brought, by rude hardship and cruel fortune, to this pitiful estate.

When she gave signs of awaking, I made a feint of yawning and stretching my arms, and then jumping up I cries—

“Lord, cousin, I do believe we’ve been a-napping!”

“Why, where are we, Benet?” says she.

“That we will presently see,” says I; and putting some leaves on the embers that yet

glowed, I blew them up into a flame, and by this light in a twinkling I set up a mat with the oar and a half that were left us, and begged my lady to repose herself, if she would make a shift with that poor accommodation, for the night.

The next morning being tolerably fair we made a voyage around our lake, and though we examined the inlets and rocks closely we could discover no issue, save that (as I have said afore) by which we had come in, where the waters were still flowing in pretty freely. This perplexed us considerably, for besides the stream from the Baraquan there were constantly falling into the lake some half a dozen runnels from springs in the rocks; yet, as we could plainly see, the water had not risen in the night, but rather fallen away, if anything. However, on taking a second turn round the lake, we were like to have had this mystery explained in a fashion that was more conclusive than agreeable; for coasting closer than heretofore by those rocks that rose sheer out of the water, we felt ourselves suddenly within the influence of a current, which drew us

with incredible velocity towards a deep vortex of whirlpool, by which these waters were drawn into some subterraneous passage through the rocks, and 'twas only by employing our utmost strength and skill that we thrust our canoa out of the flow, and so (thanks be to God!) escaped being sucked into that horrid gulf.

When we were somewhat recovered of the disorder into which this late peril had thrown us, I pointed out to my lady that there appeared no way of escaping from our captivity but by the stream that had brought us thither. "For," says I, "'tis questionable if ever we can scale those steep and slippery rocks that surround us."

"And could we do so," says she, "we must go empty-handed, for sure we could never drag our canoa up there, nor any of those things that are necessary to us. Nor have we any assurance that we shall be better off on the other side of those rocks than on this."

"You are in the right of it," says I; "then there remains nothing for it but to get back into the Baraquan as best we may."

“Ay,” says she, “but we must assuredly wait until the rainy season is past—which has but just begun—for ’twere madness to venture again into such dangers as we have by a miracle escaped.”

On hearing this I turned aside, that she might not read in my face the exultation of joy that filled my heart. And so as I made no reply she said in a rallying tone—

“Are you so very anxious to get rid of me, Benet?”

’Twas on my tongue to answer, “If I could make captivity endurable to you, I would never take you from these rocky confines;” but I kept these words to myself, though what reply I stammered in their place I cannot recall to mind.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE RAINY SEASON COMES TO AN END, BUT BY MY
DELAY WE ARE BALKED OF RETURNING INTO
THE BARAQUAN.

HAVING decided to dwell on that lake for some months to come, we set about making our cavern habitable. First of all we shifted our acutis into a separate cave hard by our abode, where they were very well housed; and thither also we carried all the dry leaves and rubbish, that we might have our floor sweet and clean, and afford no harbour for insects or worms. Then I parted off a fair corner to serve as a chamber for my lady by setting up a hurdle which I made of suitable wands, bound together with lianas, and clothing it on both sides with palmetto leaves, overlapping each other and pinned to the hurdle with thorn-stickles. To get these materials I made several voyages in the canoa amongst the wooded

slopes that were partly under water ; and in these excursions I found a good store of cassavy, and many other things that would be useful to us. When I had finished this partition to my own satisfaction and my dear lady's admiration (for she missed no occasion to encourage me with her approval), I hung up her sleeping-net and set one of the mat coverlets, which I had taken care to dry, ready to her hand. I would have had her use the other as a carpet to her feet, for I could have slept without it as well as the Ingas do ; but she would by no means hear of this, so that I was forced to forego the happiness of yielding it to her use.

And while I was about this business my dear comrade was not idle—no, not for one moment. For she herself made several expeditions in the canoa alone, getting herbs for her conies, who were so appreciative of her gentle interest that they came to eat from her hand, and did (after a while) sit of a row at the mouth of their cave straining their necks to catch sight of her coming ; and storing up in that cave such

nuts and sticks as would serve for fuel when dry. And admirable it was to see with what skill she navigated the canoa, and how resolute, bold, and masterful she showed herself in carrying out her purpose—no matter what. Yet I was heartily pleased when these journeys were done, for all the time of her absence I was in a flutter of fear, going every other minute to spy out from the cavern if I could see her, and counting upon mishaps that might come to her.

Amongst other things, she brought home certain heads of broom, with which she brushed the walls and floor, so that not a speck of dust was to be seen. And all the time we were thus working together she kept up a lively gossip with me, save when we had naught to talk about, and those intervals we filled up by singing together certain simple songs that Cornish children sing, so that we had not a dull hour all day, and were for the best part as merry as any grigs.

And lest any one should be disposed to think ill of her (as that she forgot the dignity of her

birth and breeding, and the delicacy of her sex in wearing the garb of a boy, and laying her hand with light heart to rough toil), I would urge this—that, in my humble thinking, she did infinitely more to maintain her character for nobility and true womanhood in making the best of her position with this cheerful helpful spirit, than if she had left all labour to me, and sat her down to bewail and bemoan the cruel usage of fortune. For a surety she did increase my respect thereby, and I know no man who would not hold her sex in greater veneration for the addition she made to its virtues.

I lay awake best part of the next night scheming improvements of our dwelling-place. “As my hurdle is such a success,” says I to myself, “I will make another as soon as possible, and part off a corner for my own sleeping-place, which will be more seemly and becoming than lying here on the floor of our parlour like a tom-cat. And while I am about it I may as well make a third to shut off that nook against the entrance, which will serve my lady very commodiously for

a kitchen. And there might I set up a shelf for her vessels ; and also with stones I can fashion a fireplace, with a bark chimney to carry off the smoke. The flat stone there, if I can raise it up a bit, will answer very well as a dresser to grind cassavy upon ; but I must hunt up some sort of slate for a pan to dry it over the fire, and likewise for baking the cakes when my lady has made them. More gourds I must get for certain, that my dear lady may ever have store of fresh water to her hand ; and this I shall do well to fetch from one of the fountains ere she rises in the morning, that she may not have to ask for it or fetch it herself, which else she were like enough to do. It will not be amiss, neither, if I look about pretty soon for some convenient screened-off pool of sparkling water, where she may bathe freely. And now for our living-room, which will be square and neat when I have cut off the other two sides as I design, we must have some sort of table and benches. Polished oak have we none, but stones in plenty ; and a fair stone set up straight and level must be our table ; a

stone also will serve me well enough for a seat, but my lady shall have a chair if it cost me a fortnight to make one. In the meantime she can't be left a-standing; so a stone she must have for the present, but I will make a mat of rushes to cover it, which I may do in an hour. And while I am cutting these rushes I may as well get enough over and above to strew the floor of her chamber, for I cannot abide the idea of her tender feet encountering the cold hard rock. As for her chair, I may fashion the frame with stout sticks of a proper kind, bound together with lianes crosswise, like the letter X, and it shall have a back and elbows if my ingenuity carry me such length, and the seat and back I may make of rushes woven together. If I can find rushes of divers colours to plait with a pleasing device, so much the better; and by working this secretly before she rises of a morning, I may give it to her as a surprise for a birthday gift next Monday se'nnight, which must needs give her pleasure, however poor be the merits of my workmanship." And being

got upon this theme I could not get away from it, but continued to revolve this chair in my mind till I fell asleep.

I have no space to give an account of our life day by day, though I fain would—for who can tire of narrating the history of happy hours? And so briefly I must tell that I carried out all I designed that night I lay awake, and more besides, for every day discovered new necessities, and we begrudged no labour that ministered to our common comfort. When it was fine we went a-hunting of waterfowl, of which there was abundance, and other times of game in those woods that lay high and dry; and herein did my lady show herself as deft and skilful as in all else to which she lent her hand, bringing down her quarry with an arrow as surely as ever I did, so that there was no lack of contentment on either side. And when the day was foul we stayed within our cavern—I fashioning arrows or such like, and Lady Biddy at her needle. I say her needle, for out of thorns we contrived to make things that answered this purpose; and for stuff

she had the skins of animals, which she shaped, with incredible ingenuity, into excellent socks for our feet, in place of our shoes, which were now pretty nigh worn out. Nor did we lack amusement for our leisure hours, for my admirable lady being an excellent player of checks, she taught me this game, marking our dining-table out in squares for a check-board, and using divers-shaped nuts, ground flat at one end, for men. Also I tried to devise an instrument of music in the shape of a dulcimer; but this I succeeded worse in than anything else, for we could get no agreeable notes out of it, nor any sound that was worthy to mate with the fresh sweet tones of my dear lady's voice. But it gave us amusement, for all that, and many a hearty laugh.

In this way the winter, as I must call it, though there was never a chilly day, passed away; and in those months there was not for me a single wretched hour, save when the thought forced itself upon me that it must come to an end. As suddenly as the rain had set in, it ceased,

and every cloud vanished from the sky as if by enchantment. In twenty-four hours the water sank as many inches, and as many more in the next day. With the return of the sun the birds burst into song, hallooing and whistling from morn till night. Lady Biddy went quietly about her duties and said nothing; nor did I; yet all day long a voice seemed to be saying in my ears, "You must go, Benet—you must go!" Even when I slept, the same words were repeated in my dreams. Yet I could not find the courage to tell Lady Biddy our time had come. But on the third evening, as we were standing by the mouth of our cavern, that bird we had heard before in the mountains gave tongue to his strange call. And my lady, clasping her hands, cried—

"Falmouth bells!—Falmouth bells!"

"Yes," says I, touched by the plaintive joy in her voice, "they are calling us. We must go." So the next morning we rowed over to the gap in the mountains to see if the waters were suitable for our departure yet awhile; and

there we found a great bar of refuse brought down by the winter flood and no water flowing into the lake ; nor was there sufficient depth to float our canoa. This proved to me that we ought to have gone the moment I saw the water sinking, but for shame I dared not admit the truth.

“ In a few days,” says I, “ the plain will be dry, and we shall be able to march well enough to the Baraquan.”

“ We must leave our canoa behind us, mustn’t we, Benet ? ” says my lady quietly.

“ Ay, but what of that ? ” says I, shortly ; “ cannot we make another ? ”

“ Yes,” says she ; but not a word of reproach passed her dear lips, though she must have seen that I was to blame not to have started while there was yet water to float us back to the river. And so we returned to the cave without a word, for I was in a despicable bad temper, because I knew I was in fault for not going when my conscience bade me. This ill-humour possessed me all day, though frequently my lady essayed to

return to our customary free and cordial understanding; only when night came and I lay awake I felt remorse and grief for my wicked delay in the first place, and my foolish perversity after. "Fool," says I to myself bitterly, "not content with robbing your dear lady of freedom, you have marred a day she would have rendered happy. It may be the last she will ever care to lighten for you.

I could not rest for the torment of my self-reproach. Getting out of my net I went softly in the dark to her kitchen, and passed my hand over the things she was wont to use.

"Here," says I to myself, touching her dresser — "here have we stood side by side grinding our cassavy, mirthful and light-hearted. Why were we so happy and content? Because I had none but good intent towards her; because she was confident in me. Will she ever have faith in me again, knowing I have let slip her chance to escape? Can we ever more be happy together?"

Before daybreak I rowed over to the gap,

and thence as soon as it was light I perceived that vast plain green as far as the eye could reach with the young shoots of reeds, laid bare by the further sinking of the water; but for some distance round and about the gap and extending by the hill, where the water had flowed in from the Baraquan, was a great bed of yellow mud, neither firm enough for the foot nor liquid enough for the canoa. Seeing, therefore, that no escape was possible until this mud grew hard (if ever it should), I went back very disconsolate to the cavern. And there was our morning meal spread on fair fresh leaves, which Lady Biddy employed for a table-cloth, and that dear creature waiting to greet me with a cheerful bright countenance, as if she had naught to reproach me with, though I marked a shade of anxiety beneath her sweet smile.

I told her where I had been, and, putting as good a face on it as I well could, added that we must wait a few days for the ground to harden ere we started again upon our journey. "But," thinks I, "'twill never harden, for surely from

those hills there must dribble streams that flow into the lake ; and here must my dear patient lady linger another whole year." And with this reflection, despite all my efforts to seem easy and hopeful, I fell into a despondent mood.

CHAPTER LX.

WE TRY ANOTHER MEANS OF ESCAPE, WHEREBY WE
ARE AS NEARLY UNDONE AS MAY BE.

PRESENTLY my little comrade (as I call her) got up from her chair, and seating herself beside me on my stone stool, laid her hand very tenderly on my arm, and says she gently—

“ You will tell me what is amiss, Benet, won’t you ? ”

Upon this I told her my trouble, and how I must blame myself night and day for not having started to get back into the Baraquan when the rains first gave over and the water began to sink.

“ Why,” says she, “ ’twas then too late ; for sure the water must have ceased to overflow from the great river before it ceased to flow into the lake, and, therefore, we must have found at the

entrance to the Baraquan just such a deposit of impassable mud as lies at the entrance to the lake. Thus, had we started when your conscience very unwisely bade you, we should have been finely served, for there must we have stuck betwixt two barriers, neither able to go forward nor to get back. Nor do I see," adds she, "how we were to have mended matters, for it had been madness to start before the rains ceased, and 'twas too late when they had."

In this manner did she reason with me, to my ineffable comfort, for naught that she urged was less cogent than tenderly considerate. But what delighted me even more than getting this heavy load of responsibility taken from my shoulders was the evidence of her admirable judgment and good sense in this matter; for though her wealth of goodness beggared me indeed by comparison, I was better pleased a hundredfold to admire her wisdom and feeling than if I had suddenly discovered myself blessed with these excellent qualities.

"Cousin," says I, "the justice of your con-

clusions leaves me no ground for regrets, save that I had not previously consulted you in this business."

"Why," says she with a merry laugh, "that is a regret I would not remove, for it may prompt you not to leave your 'little comrade' at home in perplexity next time you go a-boating in the dark."

After that we went together day after day across the lake to examine the ground ; but 'twas no better on the seventh day than on the first, but worse, for then we gave up all hope of the ground ever getting firm enough to traverse. As I feared, the springs and rills from the hills kept it continually moist, and the ground, being nothing but filthy ooze, gave no hold whatever to the foot, as I found, to my cost, when I attempted it, sinking up to my middle ere I had gone two paces, and with the greatest difficulty getting back with no worse misfortune. In addition to this, as the sun grew in power, this slough began to fester and putrefy, throwing off stinking vapours that raised our gorge. But that which

made this pestilent belt more abhorrent to my lady than all else was the prodigious number of great worms and hideous reptiles that came hither to writhe and wallow in the foul slime. So (as I say) at the end of a week we decided that no issue by that part was possible.

And now I began to cast my eye at the mountains that hemmed us in, for I was bent upon getting away, and would harbour no thought of staying there, however I might be tempted by inclination that way; and spying one part which looked more broken than any other, I begged my lady to let me go and see if it were any way passable. But she would not hear of my going alone, though willing enough to go anywhere if she might share the peril; so, provided with a store of food for the day and a stout stick apiece, we started off early one morning to make the venture.

For the first few hours we got on well enough, by the help of our sticks and such shrubs as grew in the fissures and cracks; but when we reached that part where the mountain was less broken

and no herbs grew, our troubles began; and to tell of all our difficulties—how we had to leap like goats in one part, and climb with hands and feet like cats in another; how we had to go back and try new ways time out of mind—would be tedious indeed; but, to cut this matter short, we came about three in the afternoon to where the mountain rose sheer up on one side, and lay in a great smooth flat table, inclining towards the lake on the other, and there was no way to go forward but upon this sloping table. And here I would have my lady desist from further adventuring; “for,” says I, “if our foot slip, naught can save us from sliding down this rock as down the roof of a house, and shooting ourselves a thousand feet on to the crags below.”

“But our foot must not slip, Benet,” says she. “And there is no more danger here than we have encountered before.”

Still I hesitated, but she, thinking I was concerned only for her, urged me to go on; and I, on the other hand, considering that this was our last and only chance of escape, at length

consented, only bargaining that she should give me her hand to hold.

“Ay,” says she, “that will I willingly; for if you go, I have no mind to stay behind.”

“Nor I neither,” says I. And so, recommending ourselves to Providence, we went forward with our hands locked together.

Now went we along in this sort without accident a hundred yards, maybe, and then to my horror (I being ahead, with my eyes fixed on the rock under my feet) I discovered that we had come to the end of that sloping rock, and that another step would have plunged me down a great yawning fissure that showed no bottom; all was black below.

“What is it, Benet?” says my lady, as I came to a stand, for she dared not take her eyes from the ground, lest she should be seized with a vertigo.

“We must go back,” says I quietly; “there is an abyss beside me which we cannot cross.”

“Very well,” says she after a moment’s pause. “Tell me when you are ready.”

"We will wait a minute till your strength comes back," says I, for I felt her fingers quivering, despite my close hold.

"Nay, let us go at once, lest my courage fail," says she faintly. "But have a care when you come to the little ledge: it is loose; I felt it slide under my foot."

"Let me change places, that I may go first," says I.

"No, no!" cries she in an agony, as I was about to move; "for Heaven's sake, do not venture down the slope to pass me—do not leave go of my hand."

"So be it," says I; "but do prythee await till you feel stouter of heart." And then I tried to restore her confidence by all the means I could; but indeed my own heart quailed within me. For to realise our terrible position, you must fancy yourself standing on the steep sloping roof of the highest cathedral, with no parapet to arrest your fall, and one of the slates so loose that it may slip under your foot, no matter how carefully you step.

“Thank you, Benet,” says my dear lady. “You have brought my courage back. Come, let us go.”

So with that she begins that backward journey; but now, instead of looking to the rock under my own feet, I was casting my eyes to my dear lady's for that loose rock she had spoken of. Presently I caught sight of it—a great slab that lay on the slope, with no space behind for a footing, and too wide to step across. And seeing this I sought with an eager fury for some means of stopping our fall if this slab should slide under our feet, but I could spy nothing but a fissure behind the slab, into which I might by chance thrust my arm in falling.

Now scarcely had my eye made this out when my dear lady stepped on the slab, and, to my sickening horror, I perceived it tilt a little, being very nicely poised; and doubtless had I set my foot firmly upon it at that moment, our combined weight would have held it firm and stationary, as it had in passing over it before,

until it was released of my weight. But this did not occur to my slow wit at the right time—nay, rather, seeing this movement, I held back, and would have drawn my lady away. This hesitation (and maybe a little jerk I gave in my terror to her hand) was fatal, for ere I could cry aloud to her the great slab slid, and my dear lady, in striving to keep her balance, lost her footing and fell; then seeing that I was like to be drawn down the slope myself, when nothing in the world could have saved us from sliding with the slab to perdition, I threw myself on my face, and, flinging aside my stick, thrust my arm down that rent in the rock of which I have made mention. Thus I lay sprawled on that steep incline, half the length of my left arm wedged in the fissure above my head, and my right hand linked to my Lady Biddy's as she lay prone upon the slab.

My sole thought was to hold my dear lady, and this was no slight matter, for the edge of the slab had caught in her waist-belt, so that for a moment she and that great mass of rock

hung, as I may say, on my bent arm. In that moment the bone of my forearm snapped like a dry stick, and indeed I thought my muscles must be torn asunder also, so sharp and strong was the strain upon it; but, thanks be to God, my lady's belt bursting, the slab slid from beneath her, and so was I relieved of that prodigious weight.

We heard the slab screech as it grated down the slope; then followed an interval of silence, in which one might have counted a score, followed by a great crash as the rock fell upon the crags below, smiting my soul with awe to think how we had surely been hurled down with it to our utter destruction but for a mercy of Providence.

But my arm was powerless to draw myself up, and fearing the torment of it might take away my senses, so that I might let my lady's hand slip, I called to her—

“Cousin,” says I, “are you hurt sorely?”

“No,” replies she faintly, “only frightened, Benet.”

“God be praised!” says I. “Now do you, if you may, roll hither and climb up by my body to the rock above, for I have no strength left.”

And this she did, but with great pain and trouble, for the dear soul trembled in every limb, and was faint from the shock. I helped her as well as I might with my right arm, yet could I do but little for my own sickness. However, she presently got strength from a source which never fails to invigorate such hearts as hers; for, coming as high as my shoulder, she cries—

“Dear Benet, your arm is broken;” and with that she quits my body and starts to her feet, which had she not dared to do under other conditions.

“Nay,” says I, “take no heed of that, but do you place your feet upon that crevice, which will give you a good hold.”

“Ay, surely,” says she, stepping up briskly. “Now may I help you, my poor Benet; give me your right hand, and have no fear. See how strong I am!”

Indeed, in helping me to my feet she proved herself as lusty as any man ; and in getting from that horrid slope to a place of safety I owed more to her a hundredfold than she to me.

Of her readiness and tenderness in making a sling to bear my arm ; of her gentle, encouraging words as she led the way down the rocks to our cavern, ever choosing the way most direct and least difficult for me ; of her thoughtfulness in running forward to fetch me cool water from a spring to sup ; of these things, I say, and many others, I have no words to speak, for no words that I know of can do her justice.

CHAPTER LXI.

I FALL INTO A DISMAL SICKNESS, AND RECOVER
THEREOF.

WHEN we were got into our cavern, my dear lady, of her own hand and wit, cut some strips of bark to serve as splints, and some of that grass which she used to shred for threads ; then ripping up the sleeve of my doublet she, with her gentle soft fingers, set the bone of my broken arm, and bound it up in the bark as ably and well as any clever surgeon could have served me. After that, seeing that the sweat of agony stood on my face, despite the joy it gave me to feel the touch of her sweet hand, and to note how admirably skilful she was in this business (as in all else), she would have me lie down awhile ; and to this end she spread one of our mats on the floor of our living-room, that I might get the benefit of the air, and made up a

pillow for my head with a bundle of soft herbs that we kept in store for the conies ; and scarce had I laid my head down with a look and a little murmur to express my heartfelt gratitude (for I had no power to speak) when the things about me seemed to swim round and round, and I lost consciousness.

I lay in a foolish dream some time (though what absurdity was in my mind I cannot recall), and waking at length to my proper senses, the first thing I observed was that something cool and soft pressed my forehead, and looking up I perceived my little comrade kneeling beside me, with grave wistfulness in her deep eyes.

“What o’clock is it?” says I, like any fool.

“Nay, never mind about the hour, dear Benet,” says she tenderly ; and with that she shifts her hand, which was that I felt so gratefully cool on my forehead. But she shifted it only to set the other in its place, whereupon I sighed with comfort. Seeing I was pleased, she smiled sweetly, and says she—

“D’ye know me, Benet?”

“Ay, cousin,” says I, “why should I not?”

“’Tis three days since you last called me ‘cousin.’ Your mind has been wandering away from me.”

“Is it possible?” says I.

“I feared you were going to leave me here alone for ever,” says she, her voice trembling, and her eyes twinkling with a tear. “But you’ve come back to me after all,” adds she with a faint laugh, and a little gulp as she turned aside to dash the tears away with her unoccupied hand.

“God be praised!” says I.

“Amen, amen, amen!” says she with passion. “And now do you taste of this broth I have made.”

So I quickly made a shift to sit up, with her help, and eagerly emptied the gourd of the broth she had prepared; for not only was I prodigious hungry, but a stout determination seized me that I would overcome my weakness, and give this dear, dear companion no further anxiety.

“Give me some more if you have it, cousin,” says I.

“To be sure I have more,” says she. “What sort of a housewife should I be if my larder were empty when I expected company?”

Watching her narrowly as she hurried herself to refill the gourd, I observed, with a keen pang of sorrow, that her sweet face was thin and worn with care, albeit her fair countenance was overspread with a glow of happy contentment.

She bade me lie down again when I had emptied the second bowl of broth; and then, to please me, she brought her breakfast (for 'twas early morning), and ate it sitting on the ground beside me, which was her will and not mine. And when I asked her what had been amiss with me, she told me I had been light-headed, and would for ever be a-starting off to find my uncle Sir Bartlemy, though too weak to rise, and obedient to her hand, though I knew her not. “But,” says she, “since yesterday morning you have had no strength even to speak, and I have heard no sound but——” She stopped, but

I knew by the sound that rose from her tender bosom it was her own sobs she had heard. "But all that is past," says she cheerily; "and now you will soon be well again, and strong, won't you?"

"Ay," says I. "I promise you I'll be master of those mountains in a week."

"Benet," says she earnestly, "you must grant me a favour."

"With all my soul," says I.

"Then promise me you will never again essay to pass those terrible mountains. Promise!" says she. "And this also—that you will not approach that pestilent marsh, for I do think 'tis the fœtid mists from the corruption there which has thrown you into this sickness."

"You ask too much of me," says I, "for how, but by one of these ways, can I hope to carry you hence? You have not reflected on that."

"Yes, I have," says she quietly. "I know that I am asking you to stay with me in the

captivity to which our fortunes have brought us. Have we not sought by all the means in our power to escape? If Providence willed us to go hence, should we be thus cruelly rebuffed? Is it not better, Benet, to live here together than to perish singly? Oh, I cannot bear the thought of that. To be left alone—no one to speak to—no voice to cheer me! Have we been unhappy? Can we ever be without comfort, striving each to make the other happy? We may yet improve our cabin: the summer is at hand.”

“Say not another word,” says I; “I ask no more than to continue as we have lived.” Indeed, I was like to have become light-headed again with the prospect revealed to me and the overflow of joy in my heart; and this tumult of emotion threw me back again, not yet being quit of my fever, so that I lay down exhausted in a kind of lethargy, from which I could not arouse myself even to taste the food from my dear lady’s hand, which she had prepared for me. Nay, towards evening I felt as if my last hour had come for weakness, and when she, kneeling by

my side, laid her sweet cool hand upon my head as before, asking me how I did, 'twas with much ado I could open my eyes to reply by a look that I was very easy in my mind, as indeed I was, suffering no sort of pain, but only a very sweet dreaminess to think she was to be my companion always. So I lay with this drowsiness growing on me, never moving a handstir till the moon rose and shone upon me through the mouth of the cavern, where doubtless I looked like one dead, as I think, for my dear lady, still kneeling beside me, began to weep softly, which, though I heard it, I could find no strength to check by any hopeful sign, because of my heaviness. Then, taking my hand and bending low, she murmurs with a broken voice, and in such disconsolate tones as were enough to move the heart of the dead—

“You won’t leave me, Benet dear—you won’t leave me!”

And at that I managed to open my eyes and say “No;” therewith making bold to lift her hand a little. Then she, seeing what I would

be at, aided me, so that I laid her lovely little hand on my mouth and kissed it.

So, animated with a new vigour, and a sturdy determination that I would not yield to this faintness, but would master it for her sake, I contrived to ask her if she would make me a potion of those herbs the Ingas had given us, which I thought would do me good.

“I have it here ready,” says she, “if you can but raise your head to drink of it. Wait, let me slip my arm under your head and around your neck—so.”

In this tender fashion she helped me to rise, and set the gourd to my lips, from which I drank the brew to the bottom, which was as good as any apothecaries’ drugs, and full as bitter.

This potion, together with my persevering resolution, did me a world of good, so that in a couple of hours I felt strong enough to get up on my feet, if needs be; perceiving which, my lady acceded to my entreaty, and laid herself down to take some repose, which she needed sorely, for I doubt if she had closed an eye all

through my sickness. For my own part, I had no longer inclination to sleep, but lay devising means for improving our cavern as my lady had suggested, for one thing resolving I would try to make a partition to my lady's chamber that would let in the light, and yet secure her privacy, which I proposed to do with a sash of canes stretched over with bladder-skin; "and thereon," thinks I, "may she paint some pretty devices with such juice-stains as we can get, that it may have all the pleasant gay look of a painted glass window."

'Twas a great pleasure to me devising all this, but the telling of it the next morning to my lady was yet greater joy, for the delight she showed in the scheme. She brought her chair up, and sitting beside me listened with sparkling eyes a whole hour to all I had to say on this trumpery; but no matter seemed paltry to her which interested me, and I do believe she would have given her serious thought to discourse on a fiddlestick's end if my mind had been bent that way, so entire was her sympathy.

“Benet,” says she in the end, “I do think there is no man in the world so ingenious as you in the service of a friend, nor so unselfish neither. For while you thought I wished to quit this place, naught could exhaust your patience in seeking the means; and now that you find I would stay, your first moments of consciousness are devoted to making my life here agreeable. Nay, it seems to me that you have overcome your sickness because you saw that my happiness, my very life, depended on it.”

“Why, so I have,” said I; and therewith I told her how that I had taken that resolution to live when I felt myself sinking into the heaviness of death.

She looked at me with kind, wondering eyes as I spoke, and for some moments sat in silence, her hands folded on her knees, and bending towards me. Then says she, “Oh! Benet, if we all strove to live for our friends as readily as we offer to die for them, how much more should we merit their love.”

Soon after this she took her bow and arrows

and went off in the canoa to seek food for our supper in the wooded slope ; but the dear girl did so steer her course that I might as long as possible see her from where I lay by the mouth of the cavern.

CHAPTER LXII.

I AM PUT TO GREAT TORMENT BY MY PASSION.

As soon as I was strong enough to get about, I went daily with my lady into the woods a-hunting; but as yet my left arm was useless, though getting strong apace, so that I could but play the part of squire to her. But, Lord! to see how dexterous she was with the bow, and how true her aim, did give me more pride and pleasure than any of my own prowess. Yet from the tenderness of her love for all living things she was averse from this practice, which we men regard as an amusing pastime, and therefore would she kill nothing but that which was necessary to our existence.

I remember one day, when she had drawn her bow to shoot a dove that sat pluming its wings on a bough, she relaxed the string and returned the arrow to her sheaf.

“’Tis a fine fat pigeon,” says I, “and we have naught for our supper: why have you spared it?”

“Do you not see her mate in the bough above?” says she. And so we supped on fruit and cassavy that night; but with no regret.

However, if there were moments of pain in these expeditions, there were long hours of delight; for now the woods were as like to Paradise as the mind of man can conceive, nothing lacking to enchant the senses; and to speak of all the rare and beautiful flowers and fruits we carried home to garnish our cavern and table would be an endless undertaking. And as these woods, valleys, and purling streams were like Paradise, so was I like a blessed soul therein; and I doubt if many men in all their lives sum up so much pure joy as every minute yielded to me. Here, day after day, I strolled beside my dear lady in the shade of delicate flowers, enveloped in sweet odours, and with warbling birds around us. But to my senses the sweetest music was her voice, the daintiest bloom her cheek, the

most intoxicating perfume her breath. Looking around, it seemed to me that all Nature did but reflect her beauty, and therein lay its perfection. There were favourite spots where we would rest, noting the development of familiar things—how these buds expanded, how that fruit ripened, how the young birds began to stretch their naked necks beyond the nest's edge, crying for food, etc.; indeed, there was such scope for observation, and my dear lady was so quick to perceive and appreciate all things of beauty, that no moment was dull or tame.

While we indulged to the full our love for rambling, we were not unmindful of domestic things. The season was now come for plucking silk grass, and of this we cut an abundance, and laid it on the rocks to dry; for my lady designed to plait it, in the Ingas' style, into a long strip, which she might make up into clothing by-and-by. This plaiting was the first work I put my hand to, and though I bungled sadly over it to begin with, I grew defter in time, so that I could do it as well in the dark as in the day. Many an

evening we sat weaving our grass hour after hour, with no light but that of the stars as they twinkled forth, chatting the whole while of other matters. But before I got to this proficiency—indeed, as soon as I could plait decently—I made a hat for my lady; not so much like a woman's as a boy's, that it might go fairly with her habit; and this, with a couple of bright tail-feathers from a macucagui* stuck in jauntily o' one side, became her mightily, though I say it; but, for that matter, anything looked well that she took for her use.

About this time we had the good fortune to catch a partlet sitting on a nest of fifteen eggs; taking these home without delay, we clapped the eggs in a corner of our conies' cavern, where the hen, after some little ado, sat down upon them, being hemmed in with the hurdle that parted off my bed-chamber from our parlour, which I fetched out for that purpose.

About a fortnight later my Lady Biddy

* These birds are as like our pheasants as any two peas in a pod.—B. P.

came to me in great glee one morning to say that every one of the eggs was hatched out; and I know not which looked the more content, this old hen strutting carefully amidst her chicks as proud as a peacock, or my dear lady casting some cassavy pap before them for a meal.

And now the conies multiplying prodigiously, that cavern was full of young live things, so that there was as much work to provide for their mouths as our own; but there was never too much for my lady to do, and she would not part with a single one.

“They are my children,” she would say, with a little sadness in her smile.

With these innocent pleasures and hard work my lady beguiled the days, and so two months passed away—two months, as I say, of inexpressible delight for me. Not a day passed without my discovering some new charm in her person, some fresh grace in her character, which I had previously overlooked. And how to keep this adoration that filled my soul from overflow-

ing by my lips, or my eyes, was almost more than I could compass.

One day when I was culling a nosegay, and seeing in the pale pink and cream hue of the flowers resemblance to my lady's cheek, I (being then alone) did with extravagant passion bury my face in the fresh cool bloom, kissing them till my transport was spent. Then, looking again at the blossoms, I was sobered to perceive how I had crushed out their freshness and beauty, so that they no longer bore any likeness to my dear lady's face.

So then I resolved I would not suffer myself to fall in love with her; but that was easier said than done. For 'twere as easy to promise you would not grow an hungered or athirst. However, one thing was possible, if I had any manhood, and that was to keep my love from being known to my dear lady.

Nevertheless, before long I had reason to believe she had guessed my secret, for she also grew silent and downcast beyond her wont, and more than once I spied her looking at me

with pity and sorrow, as if she knew of my trouble.

One day, when I addressed her as “my lady,” she said—

“Why should you call me by a title here where there is no distinction? Why not call me ‘sister,’ Benet, or plain ‘Biddy?’—for we are as brother and sister to one another, are we not, and must ever be?”

This hint showed what was in her mind; and yet if she had learnt my secret, God knows it was against the best I could do to hide it.

I called her “sister” after that, hoping it would train my mind to think of her in that relation; but it did not, so that I knew not what remedy to get for the fever of my heart.

One morning we were made merry at breakfast by the partlet making her way over the rocks that divided us from the conies’ cave, and bringing all her brood to pay us a visit, which was as much as ever she could tempt them to undertake, and called for prodigious chuckling and scratching on her part. Our diversion

somewhat relaxed the feeling of restraint within me, and when my dear lady, taking up a chick in her fair hands, held it up that I might see how bright and free were its eyes, I, looking all the while upon the lovely girl's head that was so near me, was within an ace of bending down to touch it with my lips. Now this being a Tuesday was the day for grinding our cassavy meal, and perceiving by my heat that I dare not trust myself to stand by our bench all the morning beside my lady, I made believe I had a relish for fish that day, and begged her to take her rod and line and go a-fishing while I ground the cassavy.

"Nay," says she, "do you go a-fishing, for your arm is not yet strong enough to do this hard work alone."

But I protested I was able to do this, my arm being as well as ever it had been, and that she was a better angler than I (as indeed was true), and so she presently took her rod and went over the rocks to a pool where fish abounded. When I had ground my meal and

set the kitchen neatly in order, I betook myself to the rocks straightway; for I could never abide to let my lady be long out of sight, for fear of accident befalling her. And that I might not scare the fish, I approached the pool noiselessly; but turning a rock that screened that part from view I was brought of a sudden to a stand by spying my poor little comrade sitting on a big stone, her rod lying idly beside her, her elbows on her knees, and her face buried in her hands. She made no sound, but I could see, by the twitching of her shoulders, that she was sobbing. Then would I have given all the world to be able to go thither and comfort her—to draw her to me and soothe her as a brother might his sister. But reflecting that we were but brother and sister in name, and that I should but add to her distress by my endeavours to assuage it, I drew back as silently as I had come, and going back to the cavern I sank down on my stone stool as wretched and sore at heart as might be.

“Poor soul,” thinks I, “she must needs weep

at times to relieve her over-charged heart. There are birds that do pine away in captivity. This is no home for her. These chicks and conies can never replace the friends she has lost and can never hope to rejoin. Here there is naught to hope for; even Nature must cease to charm her when she sees that these mountains and waters serve as the bars of a cage. What cheerful word can I whisper? What can I do to bring joy into those dear eyes? "

In this sort did I spend the time till I heard her voice feigning to hum a merry ditty, when I also put on a careless look to hide my care.

She had caught half a dozen fishes, so that she could not have given way long to grief; nor was it in her nature to yield to useless regrets. If I had judged only by her present manner I should have said that nothing was amiss with her, for she persevered in sprightly conversation, albeit I could join in it but poorly; still, as we sat to our dinner, I noted that the lids of her pretty eyes were swollen and red. Also I observed that her cheek was thinner than it used

to be, and the blue veins in the back of her hand more clearly marked. Then it struck me that perhaps her dejection arose from failing health, and that the vapours from the fens, wafting over the lake, had already attacked her, as they had before seized me.

Then of a sudden this thought came to me as I looked at her—

“What should I do without my dear little comrade?”

And at this reflection it seemed as if the food I was eating must choke me.

God knows how I got through that meal. When it was over, I made a pretence of feeding the conies to go apart where I might give vent to the terrible emotion that brought me to a despairing grief. And saying again, “What should I do without her?” I wept like any child, but with the difficulty of a man, so that I felt as if my heart was being torn out of my breast, and beat my foot upon the ground in agony.

However, this weakness passed away with

my tears, and then bracing myself up with more manly fortitude I swore, betwixt my clenched teeth, that all the powers of Nature should not keep my lady prisoner there. As I said this, my eye fell upon a mark on the rock, left by the turbid swollen waters, and marking how the waters were now fallen from this height a good five fathoms, I conceived a means of escape which had never before occurred to me.

CHAPTER LXIII.

WE ENTER INTO A CAVERN, THE LIKE OF WHICH
NO MAN HAS EVER YET TOLD OF.

No sooner did this new idea come to me than I sprang down the rocks to where our canoa lay, stepped into it, pulled up the stone which served as an anchor, and, in a perfect rage of haste, paddled to that part of the lake where, as I have told, we were like to have been drawn down with the whirlpool.

To this region we had found no occasion to go since our first hazardous voyage thither, there being no woods, but only the high stony mountain. But now, nearing this part, I perceived, with a tumult of joy, a wide cavern in the rock, disclosed by the falling of the water from its previous height : moreover, there was no longer any whirlpool there, but only a gentle current flowing into the cavern, which was the natural

efflux of the streams that came down from the mountains. And it can be readily understood that when the waters were swollen so prodigiously as to lie some depth above this cavern, there should be that vast eddy as they were sucked down to find vent by this passage.

Without fear I pushed my canoa to the very edge of the cavern and looked within; and, though the pitchy darkness of it was frightful enough, yet I was comforted by hearing no great noise of tumbling water, nor even the faintest echo, save of a little ripple, which convinced me that I might safely venture therein, with the assurance I should come to no horrid falls, but reach, in due course, the issue of this stream upon the other side of the mountain. But I could go no further at this time for my impatience to carry comfort to my dear lady. So back I went with as much speed as I had come, and, seeing my dear lady standing at the cavern-mouth, looking for me, I cried out with all my force for joy. Then, coming all breathless to where she stood in amaze, I

essayed to tell her; but for some moments could utter no comprehensible words.

“Why, what is the matter with you, Benet?” says she.

“My little comrade,” gasps I, “you shall weep no more. Your cheek shall grow full and rosy again. I have found the means to get from this accursed venomous prison!”

Lady Biddy looked at me in mute amazement, my feverish excitement giving her good reason to doubt whether I was not bereft of reason; but, to cut the matter short, for 'twas ever to me an easier matter to act than to talk, I begged her to step into our canoa, that I might show her my discovery. This she did without further ado, whereupon I pushed across the lake till we came to the newly-found cavern, and there cast out our anchor of stone, that we might examine the entrance at our ease.

“There,” says I, pointing into the grotto—
“there lies our road to liberty!”

She peered into the darkness some time in silence, and then, with a hushed voice—

“I see no glimmer of light, Benet,” says she.

“Nay,” says I, “doubtless the tunnel reaches far and has many windings ere it disembogues beyond the further side of these mountains; but assuredly it has an issue, and I conclude the passage must be sufficiently commodious, since it gives no echo of break or fall, and has sufficed to carry off the vast body of waters so speedily, for you must remember how suddenly the lake fell after the flood ceased to rush in from the Baraquan. I believe you have nothing to dread here.”

“I am ever ready,” says she, “to put my life in your hands; but have you no fear for yourself?”

“I value my life only as it may serve you,” says I with a transport.

On that, with a sudden impulse, she stretched out both hands to me, while her eyes were flushed with a tear of joy. As quickly I seized them in mine, pressing them as I had not hitherto dared. She did not try to draw them

away, but smiled, while a single tear coursed down her cheek ; and if I had drawn her to my breast that moment, I think she would have made no resistance, so virginal innocent was her heart, and pure from any feeling but that of responsive affection.

We lost no time in beginning our preparations for departure, and that evening we made up into cakes for next day's baking all the cassavy meal I had ground in the morning for our week's consumption. I was up at daylight the next morning, and, having made a good fire on the kitchen hearth, killed and dressed four acutis and a couple of chickens, for there was no knowing how long we might go before we again got fresh supplies. By this time, my lady having come back from her morning bath all fresh and bright as any pink after a summer shower, we sat down to our breakfast very merry and hopeful, discoursing all the while on the business before us. After that she set to a-baking of our cakes on the hearth and roasting meat at another fire, so that one would have thought we

expected to entertain friends, and were preparing a banquet for them. While this was about, I went into the wood to cut some poles for guiding us through the cavern, and also I got me some good canes, with which I proposed to fence about our canoa, that we might be fended from sudden encounter with sharp rocks. In addition I gathered a good store of fresh fruit, and a quantity of cuati-nuts on their branches, which the Ingas use for lamps, etc., than which no candles of wax give better light with less smoke.

All these things I carried back to the cavern by the time the sun had reached the meridian, and there I found dinner spread on our table, and no more sign of disorder than on any other day, my Lady Biddy being one of those excellent rare women, who, no matter how busy they be, keep a clear head, and neglect none of those comforting attentions on which domestic happiness so much depends.

The rest of that day I spent in strengthening and defending our canoa (our fate depending thereon as much as anything), while my lady

packed up those things we were to carry with us; and many a time she came to me in distress to know if we could not carry this, or if we must leave that or t'other, for I had bid her take no more than was needful to us.

"The truth is," says she, when I went to her once, "I have not the heart to leave anything behind; for I cannot touch a thing but that it reminds me of the pleasure you have given me in making it for my use." Then after a pause, in which she looks around her, "Oh! Benet," adds she, "I never realised till now how happy we have been here; so I must needs feel sad in leaving these tokens behind."

The next morning we packed our effects in the canoa, and this being done, we carried my lady's pets from the conies' cave (as I call it) to the wood, and there set them free; but, Lord, to see these dumb things at the water's edge (the conies on their hind-legs), looking after their mistress, as if they had a notion they should never see her again, touched our hearts with sad regret.

“Farewell, you dears!” says my lady tearfully; and then, as we glided past our cavern, “Farewell, little home!” but she could say no more.

So in silence we neared that cavern where we were about to venture our lives; for I now perceived how serious and grave a business lay before me.

Before entering the grotto, I lit one of the cuati-nuts, and stuck it in a fork of green hard wood I had fixed to the prow of the canoa for that purpose. Then, my lady having a pole out on one side, and I one on the other, we recommended ourselves to Providence, and pushed into the darkness.

For some time we went gently down with the current, only using our poles to keep us head foremost, and as nigh the middle of the stream as we could judge. And here it was admirable to see how the rocks on either hand and above flashed back the light from our flaming nuts, for all the world like cut diamonds; but after a while, upon looking back,

the opening of this cavern (through which we had come) looked no bigger than the flame of a penny candle, and the glitter of the rocks grew less perceptible, from which we concluded that the grotto, instead of diminishing, was increasing in capacity. At first this was no matter of regret, but rather the contrary; but by-and-by, when we could descry no light at all behind us, nor any reflection from the rocks around, a strange feeling crept upon me, for which I can find no name. Save the reflection of the burning nut upon the black water, and our own figures as we stood up in the canoa (which were shadowy enough for creatures of another world), we could see nothing. The water under the fire lay as still and smooth as any polished mirror; for aught we could tell, the current had ceased to flow, and we had come to a standstill. I thrust my pole out on either side; it touched nothing. I slid it downwards into the water, and my arm also up to the elbow, without striking the bottom. Then I struck upward as far as I could reach, without meeting any resist-

ance. And on this I looked in my lady's face, and saw it white as a ghost's, and full of awe.

"We seem to have drifted into the world of nothing," says I sportively.

She lifts up her finger in silence a moment, and then in a whisper says she—

"There is no echo."

This indeed impressed me, more deeply than all the rest, with a sense of that vastness and obscurity in which we stood; and I could not speak, for fear of I know not what. And then, as we stood in that wondrous silence, there came a hollow voice from the immensity above, echoing my words after all this interval, but in such a hollow, muffled sound as you may hear after dropping a stone into a deep well.

"Are we moving, Benet?" says my lady, drawing a little nearer to me.

But I could not say whether we were or not, nor knew I any device, to ascertain the truth.

I made my lady sit down, seeing she was much terrified by this strange experience, and replenished the fire at the prow; for though this

light was of no service for our guidance, yet I felt that to be without it would be terrible, in good sooth.

So we waited, gazing about us for some sign of change (with the hope we were yet moving with a current whose flow was too even for perception), until I guessed by my feelings it must be getting on for noon. Then, with what spirit I could muster, I proposed we should eat our dinner. But a more ghostly meal I never ate in my life ; for all seemed so unreal that it was difficult to believe in our own existence almost. Nay, it crossed my mind that, for aught we knew to the contrary, we were now in some limbo of a future state.

“ I do not think we are moving, Benet,” says my lady, when our meal was at an end ; “ shall we not use our oars ? ”

“ With all my heart,” says I ; “ but as to steering, we must leave that to Providence.” Indeed, I should long before have brought our oars into play but for the uncertainty as to whither we might come. For ’twas as likely

as not we should pull in the wrong direction, having nothing for our guidance, and so, getting out of the current (if current there were), come into some stagnant part of those waters, where we might paddle about for ever and a day and find no exit; but of this I said nothing, lest I should inspire my lady with more terrors than she had already.

And so we rowed on, from time to time replenishing our fire, and my heart sickening at the thought that we might be pushing into the depths of a boundless space, and away from all hope of deliverance. We had food for a week; but I doubted our fire-nuts would hold out three days. And when they were all spent, we must row in endless night, neither seeing each other nor any faintest glimmer, and that only till our food was spent. At this I did fervently pray for mercy—if it were only to catch sight again of the mouth by which we had entered—that we might get back once more into the light of day. My poor little comrade was thinking at this time of the sunlight and her conies, with a

longing to be back in our deserted cavern, as she told me.

We rowed till our strength was exhausted ; then I bade my lady lie down and rest, while I watched and kept the nuts burning. When she had taken her slumbers, she insisted upon my doing likewise, and with some reluctance I, in my turn, lay down and fell asleep.

I awoke, and then seeing nothing whatever, for the light was no longer burning, I cried out with a terrible fear that my lady was no more.

But her sweet voice brought me quick relief, as she told me that she had thought it best to economise our fuel. "And, Benet," says she, "are we not more likely to catch sight of a faint light in the distance if we have no fire here to dazzle our eyes ?"

"Why, there you are in the right, as you ever are," says I.

"That emboldens me to another suggestion," says she. "As we have not been rowing for many hours, it may be that we have drifted again into

a current, so do let us rest as patiently as we can doing nothing."

I agreed to this, and we passed an interminable time, as it seemed, as best we might; but, truly, no hours ever spent in that dear soul's company were ever so tedious or weary. For, as I say, we had no means of telling whether we were moving or standing still; but lay there, seeing nothing, hearing no sound, feeling no motion, and in a state of uncertainty and dread of unknown possibilities that was enough to drive one to a frenzy.

And so we lay or drifted (I know not which) for a time that seemed to have no end. Once or twice we made a pretence of being hungered, though, Lord knows, 'twas pain to swallow a morsel for our vast terror; and sometimes we made as if we would go to sleep awhile, but could never close our eyes for blinking at the darkness in hope of seeing some sign of light; and from time to time we burnt a fire-nut, but without perceiving any change at all in our condition.

But at length, when we were beginning to talk of the advisability of rowing again, for we were as blind to our position as ever, to our unspeakable joy we felt the cane fender of the canoa grinding against the rocks, and before I could get a light to see where we were, my lady cried aloud with joy—

“Look, dear Benet—look up there!”

And casting my eyes round, without knowing whither she pointed, I presently spied a bright star; and the next moment the whole starry firmament was revealed.

Thus did we come out of that wondrous cavern in the night, having gone into it in early morning; but whether we had been therein one day or three we could never make out.

CHAPTER LXIV.

HOW (AMONGST OTHER MATTERS), IN SEEKING TO
KILL A SNAPPING BOAR, WE FALL UPON AN
OLD FRIEND.

No hearts were more joyful than ours at this escape from that cave of eternal night (as my lady called it). To us the little stars were as full of radiance and comfort as the sun at mid-day, so that we could do naught but feast our eyes for a long while. But we were not unmindful of our debt to Providence for this deliverance, taking it as a special mercy that we had been brought out in the night; for the light of day would have blinded us to a certainty after being plunged so long in impenetrable darkness, as men eating after starvation do drop dead of surfeit.

Being no more inclined to sleep than a

throstle in the morn (for this was to us, indeed, rather the break of day than the fall of night), we went gently down with the stream, which was of a reasonable body, winding awhile amongst rocks, but coming at length to an open country, whence we caught sight of the moon resting on the top of those mountains we had passed under, and more fair than ever we had counted it before.

For many days our minds were haunted (as of a dream) with the recollection of those fearful hours under the mountains, and meeting some friendly Ingas we questioned them about it; but as well as we could make out, they knew it only for a mighty den, whence they supposed the river sprang; but they knew nothing of the issue on the other side, none ever having dared to go beyond a few fathoms of its entrance, because of the prodigious darkness and obscurity therein, etc.

I could write several books of our adventures in descending that river into the Baraquan, and so down the Oronoque, if I had the patience;

but I have not. For a man cannot be for ever a-counting of mile-stones, but must needs (seeing himself near his journey's end) run on amain, taking little heed of things by the wayside. And, in truth, having got again on the broad river, with an easy free current to bear us onward, and Nature above and around smiling upon us encouragement, we openly deemed that the worst of our troubles were over.

I say we openly deemed this, but secretly I judged that the worst of my troubles was to come. For I could no longer blind myself, as I had in the beginning of our journey, to the fact that in the end we must part. Nay, remembering the terrible shock I had sustained that day in our cavern, when I thought it possible my dear lady might die of fever, I now felt it my duty to contemplate our inevitable separation, in order that when the time came for our farewell I might bear myself with becoming fortitude. So every night, when I lay down, I repeated to myself that awful question, "What should I do without her?" setting myself to devise some manner of

life by which I might reconcile myself to the will of Providence. In this way I strove to armour myself against the sure arrow of adversity.

Whether Smidmore were alive or dead, as I sometimes guessed he might be, the result must be the same when my lady came again amongst her friends in England; for there must she resume her condition, and be honoured as a lady of position, whilst I must ever be plain Benet Pengilly, and a man of the woods. Thus, knowing I must lose her, I begrudged the movement of the sun, and saw him set each evening with a profound melancholy, knowing another day was past from the few that were to yield me happiness.

How I clung to those days, how I strained my senses to catch every word and gesture of my dear lady's, only they can imagine who have been warned by physicians that their dearest friend must surely die ere long. 'Twas, indeed, the feeling that had choked me when I believed my dear lady to be dying, only lessened

by the hope that after my last hour of joy was come, long years of happiness might be her portion.

We were many weeks—nay, months—on the river, and, as I say, we had adventures of divers kinds without number : some pleasant, and some distressful ; but, on the whole, my dear lady's health and spirits being of the best, our journey was prosperous. But as weeks and weeks passed on, it did seem we should never come to the end of this great river ; and now we began to grow mighty anxious lest the rains should set in again ere we reached the coast of Guiana, which would enforce us to take refuge from the floods till the season was past. One day we set ourselves to calculate how long we had been a-coming from the cave, and what time we might yet have for our going ; and as near as we could reckon, rain might be expected in three weeks. But as to our distance from the coast, we were without means of calculation, the Ingas on this part of the river whom we encountered understanding nothing of what we said, and showing such hostile

spirit as made us chary in seeking them for information.

It was our practice of a morning to leave our canoa in the mooring we had found for it the night before, and go a-hunting in the woods for such fruit and game as we required for the day. From one of these expeditions we were making our way back to the canoa with nothing but some fruit, and that none of the best, for we were in an unfavoured part, and our eyes on the lookout for any kind of game that might serve our turn, when my lady, being in advance of me, suddenly came to a stand.

“I am convinced,” says she in a whisper, as I came quickly to her side, “that I saw something leap behind yonder thicket,” pointing to a clump of shrubs about a furlong distant. “Do you go, Benet, to the right, while I make my way to the left, that between us we do not miss our game, for I am greatly mistaken if it be not a *tayacutirica*.”*

* These *tayacutiricas* are a kind of large snapping boars, very fierce.—B. P.

To this I agreed, begging my lady to have a care for her safety, for these creatures have tusks like any jack-knife; and so we separated, going about to get a fair shot with our arrows at the beast. Now, to get to the further side of the thicket, I must either cross an open space, or round a growth of high shrubs; and as, for lack of provisions, I feared greatly to startle our quarry before getting aim, I chose the latter. Scarce had I got beyond the thicket when I heard a scream that I knew at once no boar could make, and, fearing my lady had startled some savage Inga or jagoarete and stood in peril, I drew the sword from my belt in a twinkling, and leaping out of the scrub into the open rushed towards the thicket, shouting lustily. But ere I was half across the open I heard a voice cry out therefrom—

“Lord love you, master, do me no mischief. ’Tis but your humble servant, Matthew Pennyfarden.” And with this, out from the thicket leaps my faithful friend; but a sight to see, for the rags of clothes that covered his nakedness all

fastened together with strings of grass in lack of buttons, and a great bush of hair about his head, so that but for his voice I might not have known him.

Before I could recover of my astonishment he seizes my hand, and cries he, “ Quick, master, behind these brambles for a refuge, though I fear never a Portugal in the world now I have you at hand.”

“ There be no Portugals here, friend Matthew,” says I.

“ There you are wrong,” says he ; “ for I do assure you I spied one of ’em creeping upon me with a bow, when I sang out in the hope of alarming my mates, and had the good chance to bring you forth. Nay, look you, master ; there is the young villain ! ”

Then I burst into a good hearty laugh, for the “ young villain ” to whom he pointed was none but my dear lady, who was now running towards us. Then discerning who it was, on spying more closely, my friend Matthew slaps his leg, and cries he—

“Zookers ! ’tis her ladyship, as I might have seen if my eyes had not been dimmed with a fever. I beg your pardon a thousand times, madam, in having mistaken you for a Portugal. ’Tis not the first time I have fled from a female, but ’twould be the last if every one wore the breeches—saving your presence—to such advantage.”

“Tell me, good friend,” says she, cutting short this pleasantry on her costume, “have you happily found my uncle ?”

“Ay, madam,” he replies. “That I did by such good fortune as I shall relate to you at our leisure ; and, sure, I was no happier to find him than he to be found. I left him hale and hearty at the mouth of the Oronoque, where he guards his two ships against the accursed pirates that practise their villainous calling in those latitudes. His loving messages to your ladyship and to your master I can but ill express at this moment for my own delight in seeing you once more.”

And therewith, as if unable to restrain his affection any longer, he threw himself upon my

neck, declaring this was the happiest day of his life. "For Lord love you, master," says he, "I thought never to have seen you again; and but for the strategy I have learned of the Portugals, I could not have persuaded my company to persevere in this search for you."

"Where is your company, friend Matthew?" says I.

"Best part of 'em, master, are dead of disease, or eaten up by wild beasts," says he with a rueful shake of his head. "Only eleven of us are left out of twenty-five stout and lusty fellows who left the ships in the beginning of the summer, and they lie about a mile down the river. 'Twas as much as three boats could hold us, with our stores and provisions, when we started; but now a single boat would carry us, for our stores are long since gone, and we are all more or less wasted with privations and sickness. Only I have contrived to keep a little flesh on my bones, and that was due to a hope which the rest have long since abandoned."

“Are we still so far from the mouth of this long river?” asks my lady.

“Nay, madam; not so long but we may hope to get down to it in a few weeks,” says he, “though I have kept this from my company, lest they should insist on returning. We began our journey when the river was still swollen with the rains, and we have been for ever a-going up those rivers that discharge themselves into this, whereof there are scores, and all so alike that no man can tell which is the right but at a guess. Hows’mever, no such trouble shall we have now, for the current must bear us to the sea, and I have taken good note of the way.”

In this discourse, and much other for which I have no space, we made our way to the river, and in our canoa speedily dropped down to that part where lay the poor remnant of that good company who had braved so much to find us.

CHAPTER LXV.

WE COME AT LENGTH TO THE MOUTH OF THE
ORONOQUE, BUT WITH DISMAL FOREBODINGS.

It was piteous to see how these poor seamen, ragged as any bears, and thin as hurdles, were affected with joy when they learnt that their troubles were as good as ended—weeping and laughing by turns, like very fools. This extravagance of delight was, I say, sad to behold, for sure the sight of strong men who have lost the dignity and composure of manhood, and are brought to the weak condition of little children, is not less deplorable than the aspect of young faces overcast with the care and anxiety of age.

However, this was but the shock of suddenly returning hope, and when the transport was over they became reasonable, and mended apace. The

ease of going down that river in comparison with ascending it is incredible, as may be gathered from the fact that in one day we passed two marks set up by these poor fellows at intervals of eight and ten days. At each of such marks they would stop to give a great cheer of delight; then, filled with fresh vigour by these sure signs of rapid progress, they lay themselves with such might to their oars that 'twas as much as my friend Matthew and I in the canoa, with Lady Biddy at the helm, could do to keep up with them.

And here it may not be amiss to tell that my dear lady, before joining this company of men, had taken occasion to change her stripling's dress for the gown we had carried down with us, for now there was no longer necessity for her to penetrate the thick woods, exposing herself to brier and bramble, and she would no more appear in a dress unbecoming to her sex.

We had been descending the river best part of three weeks, when Pennyfarden assured us we were nearing an island whereon, to lighten their

boats (in order to make better head against the stream), they had left some of their stores under a tent made of a lug-sail; and soon after this, a joyful shout from the company in that boat that led the way signified that the island was in sight.

“Now,” says friend Matthew—“now shall we be all able to dress ourselves decently, and return to Sir Bartlemy like Christians, for amongst the stores is a chest of excellent buff jerkins and sea-boots.”

Presently, coming up to this island, where the seamen were already landed, we found them wandering about in great vexation and trouble, for the tent had been torn down, and they could find none of their stores, save an empty barrel and the charred end of their chest, which had been broken up for firewood.

At first we set it down that the Ingas had been there; but Pennyfarden, casting his eyes about that part where the empty barrel lay, shook his head ruefully, and declared that they had no hand in this business.

“Pray how can you tell that?” says I.

“Why, look you, master,” says he, stooping down and picking up three or four long iron nails that lay scattered in the herb, “no Inga would have wantonly cast these away, for he prizes them more than all the gold and precious stones by which we set such store. And they have not been overlooked or dropped by accident, for they were bound up in a paper, and lay at the bottom of the barrel; and, see, they are scattered broadcast around us—scattered by those who themselves had no need of such things, and were meanly minded that no one else should profit by them—wanton waste and devilry that the worst Inga would not be guilty of. I do sadly fear that this is the work of mad sailors; what say you, Master Palmer?” adds he, addressing an old seaman who had joined us.

“Like enough—like enough,” says Palmer dismally; “and if it be as you suppose, then Heaven help us all. For,” adds he, after a long-drawn sigh, “none of our shipmates would thus destroy and waste our stores unless he had

mutinied against our captain, and sought to bring grief by our undoing."

The rest of our company, coming up, joined in this opinion, and one cried that there was no hope left us. But my lady, who was ever quick to spy a comforting gleam where none saw aught but dismal clouds, told them they did wrong to despond so readily, "for," says she, "if some of the men have rebelled, 'tis clear they have gained but little by it, or they would not have come hither."

"You are in the right of it, madam," says Palmer. "If they mutinied, 'twas because they would no longer lie at the mouth of the Oronoque, awaiting our return; and had they succeeded in overcoming our good captain, they would at once have set sail and gone thence."

The company, seeing the soundness of this argument, plucked up courage again; but we all agreed that, as the mutineers might be somewhere betwixt us and Sir Bartlemy, we must proceed with caution; and as the nights were fairly light (though no moon), and the river pretty well

known to us, we resolved to journey only by night henceforth.

By the end of that week the rains began to fall. However, this gave us but little trouble, for not only did it increase the strength of the current that bore us onwards, but it lessened our danger of falling in with marauders, who would now be forced to seek shelter of some sort. My chief concern was for Lady Biddy; but I contrived to protect her from the pelting storm with a very fair kind of tent set up in the canoa.

We reached that mouth of the Oronoque where the ships lay at nightfall on the third day of the rains, and without molestation; and here, though it was too dark to make out the vessels, we discerned a light about a mile out, as we judged. Thither we considered it advisable to proceed at once, for if we found that the mutineers had overcome my uncle and held the ships, then might we with more likelihood return to land, and escape with our lives under cover of the night.

So now, with as little noise as possible, we drew out into the open, Thomas Palmer, who was an admirable good seaman, leading the way in the biggest of our boats.

We were yet a couple of furlongs from the light when Palmer stayed his rowers, and we coming up with him, he whispered us that one of the ships lay hard by without light aboard; and sure enough, on straining our eyes, we perceived on our right hand a dark mass, which might well be a ship's hulk, but I could make out nothing clearly for the pelting rain and obscurity.

"Well, Palmer," says I, "what is best to do? Shall we examine this closer or go on?"

"Master," says he, "I am for examining this vessel. For if we get an ill-reception on the further ship, and alarm is given, our retreat to the shore may be cut off by a sortie from this here."

So, being agreed amongst ourselves, we drew on till we reached the ship, and then we found

that she lay aground and on her side, as if she had been careened. Twice we pulled right round her, raising our voices to draw attention; but no one stirred aboard, and we remained unchallenged. Not a sound could we hear, nor could we find out much more with our eyes for the darkness and rain (as I say); but in passing those ports on the under side of the ship, that lay pretty near on a level with our heads as we stood up in our boats, a most sickening stench assailed our nostrils. Not knowing what to be at, we lay still for a few minutes, listening in silence; then Palmer called out lustily, and we beat the side of the ship with our oars. Never a sound did we get in reply, nor could we spy sign of movement or glimmer of light anywhere, which put our superstitious seamen to great fear. But this Thomas Palmer, being bolder than the rest, presently volunteered to go into the ship by one of the ports and get some explanation of the mystery, which he accordingly did, and after being absent some time he comes again to the port, and cries out that we

can come aboard if we will, for there is none there to do us mischief.

“What!” cries one of the seamen, “are none of our old mates aboard?”

“That I cannot tell for the darkness,” says Palmer; “but, mates or not, this I will answer for—every man-jack of ’em is dead.”

At this moment Pennyfarden, catching me by the arm, calls out—

“Lord love us, master! look above there.”

Looking up as he bade us we then perceived (our eyes being now grown accustomed to this obscurity) two bodies hanging over the sea about a fathom from our heads as we sat in our boats, on that side of the ship which (as I say) inclined over towards the water. Despite the dimness, we made these out to be the corpses of men, and doubted not that they hung there from the yard-arms above.

For some while we could do nothing but strain our eyes at these indistinct objects as they slowly swung in the little breeze that was springing, being pierced (as it were) with fear that this

was my poor old uncle, thus barbarously put to death by the mutineers ; but still more terrified with the uncertainty of the whole business, the silence, the darkness, and that foul stench of corruption that empoisoned the air.

“ Let us get hence ! ” says one of the seamen hoarsely.

“ Nay, we must know if this be our commander that hangs here ere we venture to the ship where there is light,” says Palmer. “ Have you never a tinder-box, master, or anything dry enough to burn ? ”

I had my tinder-gun dry in my pocket, and my lady found amongst our store in the canoa two or three of the cuati-nuts, and with some ado we contrived to get these alight under the tent that I have mentioned. And when they were well ablaze we rowed right under the hanging bodies, where, standing up, I suddenly brought the flaming nuts out of the tent and lifted them up as high as I could over my head, so that the light shone full on the faces above. Their eyes were staring wide open, and their

lower jaws were dropped. But one was an eye short, and I knew him at once for Ned Parsons ; while the other, by his pointed teeth alone, I could have sworn to amongst a thousand for our old enemy Rodrigues !

CHAPTER LXVI.

TOUCHING THOSE ACCIDENTS THAT HAD HAPPENED TO SIR BARTLEMY AS HE LAY AT THE MOUTH OF THE ORONOQUE.

TURNING from this grisly spectacle while still the flame was bright, Thomas Palmer cries of a sudden—

“Why, this is none of our ships; for our sides are painted of a lively hue.”

Whereupon, casting my eyes that way, I perceived that this was none but that great black ship which had been our undoing.

So now, guessing pretty well how matters stood, we no longer hesitated to draw towards that light we had been making for. And coming to it anon, and calling out loudly for those aboard, we were answered at once by the lusty voice of my stout old uncle, who had been

brought on deck by the watch on perceiving our light alongside the black ship.

Hearing his voice, my Lady Biddy cried in her sweet voice, as clear as any bell—"We are here, dear heart; we have come back to you."

To tell of the great, unbounded joy in every heart when we came on deck would call for more wit than I possess, so I must span that over and come to the time when, the day beginning to break, my Lady Biddy was induced to go into the cabin prepared for her; and my uncle and I, grown calm, sat us down together with a bottle and a paper of tobacco, and he fell to telling of his adventures; of which (not to weary the reader) will I repeat no more than is necessary.

"You see, nephew," says my uncle, "when we anchored in these roads, the water was prodigiously swollen by reason of the flux of rains; for you must understand that there is a bar to the east, which does in a manner hem in the flood. Well, here lay we very peacefully a week after the party had set out in search of you,

when what should we spy in the offing one early morn but the black ship, which I knew at once for my old enemy, and another, which hath turned out to be none other than our first ship, the *Adventurer*, fitted out as a pirate, and commanded by that villain Parsons. My first intent was to stand up to them and pay off old scores; but having regard to the weakness of our company by the absence of those picked men gone up the Oronoque, and reflecting that if I were by any accident crippled in this bout, it would go hard with you on your coming hither, I was persuaded from my purpose; but as to showing our heels to the enemy, as some advised, that would I not do. They came on, thinking to make light work of such small fry as we were; but we stood to our guns and beat 'em off all day. However, when we could no longer see to fight, I found myself so crippled that I resolved to draw our little barks into shallow water, where their heavy ships might not dance round us on the morrow as they had that day. Accordingly we put out our boats

and towed us in till we touched bottom. The next day our enemy, spying us in our new ground, lifted anchor and bore down on us, thinking to pepper us all round and about as before; but presently they ran aground at a decent distance from us by reason that they drew so much more than we; nevertheless, they were near enough to bruise us again sorely with their great guns, and that was all they wanted, for 'twas the design of that accursed Rodrigues to waste none of his men in hand-to-hand fight, but just riddle us day after day with his large shot until we sank or yielded. But herein did he reckon without taking account of the hand of Providence, which is ever on the side of right; though it does seem at times as if He would be for ever a-scourging us. That night the waters sank so prodigiously that ere daybreak both we and the pirate careened over in such sort that our guns could no longer be brought to bear one upon another, which was a comfort to us. Out of this pickle was there no way until the waters should again swell. Seeing which, this

Rodrigues sent me a mighty civil letter, saying that he had come there but to refresh his company and get water ; bearing me no ill-will, but rather the contrary ; and since, as it was evident, we must lie there neighbours for months to come, we should do better to make terms of peace and live in comfort than to go plaguing each other out of existence. To this I sent answer that I would by no means make terms with a villain, and that if he would live he must keep out of my reach. A reply came saying that he should certainly have regard to my amiable warning, and that as he was averse to useless bloodshed, he should order his company to keep to the east of our position in their expeditions ashore, and while mine kept to the west no injury would be offered us ; therewith he signed himself my ‘obedient, humble servant, Rodrigues.’ Well, nephew, I perceived it would be to our advantage to agree to this condition—tacitly, for I would never put my hand to compact with such a rascal. And, to be brief,” says my uncle, “we passed the summer without con-

versing or coming to blows with our neighbours. But foreseeing full well that Rodrigues, as soon as the waters rose, and he could float his ships, would certainly give his company the pleasure of spoiling us before going away, I took my measures to be prepared against him, keeping my company cheerful, sober, hopeful, and God-fearing, which Rodrigues could not do by his men because they were naturally of a violent, wilful disposition. So while mine daily increased in steadfastness and vigour, his grew more violent and lawless, as we could hear every night by their drunken revelry and singing of filthy songs. And then, knowing the advantage must be to him who could first get afloat, I did secretly by night convey all my heavy stores out of this ship into my companion bark, keeping aboard only such shot as I intended to deliver into that scurvy pirate. The first day of the rains we lifted; yet I still of purpose kept her careened over to deceive Rodrigues. The second morning, the water having risen within the bay still further, I found we might contrive, with the next breeze,

to right the ship and get into that deeper water where the *Black Death* lay; and with this design I got all my men to their posts, and everything ready for a speedy start. In the afternoon came a sweet little breeze from the land, on which I gave the signal; and all replying with a hearty cheer and stout hearts, we presently righted ourselves, and shaking out our sails slid easily off the sand, like a duck into a mill-pond. And now, nephew, I bore right up to Rodrigues with a warlike blast of our trumpets, and passing to that side of her where she lay exposed below the water-line, I poured such a volley through her timbers as would stay her from taking to the water if she had the mind. Then wore we round by her other side, and gave her just such another dose over her bulwarks and through her decks; but my gunners, at my desire, did take especial care to bruise all her boats, so that they could not put off to our attack. And having served Rodrigues' ship in this sort, we wore away and served his consort—for they were a couple—in the like fashion. In fine, Benet, we riddled 'em

both like a pair of colanders, and seeing by the disablement of their boats that neither of 'em could do us any further mischief, I held off, knowing they must come to yield themselves up to our mercy in the end from sheer starvation; for they had no store aboard, by reason of their wilful improvidence and headstrong insubordination, and no means to provide themselves with necessaries from the land neither, now that every boat was disabled. We counted that a few days would humble Rodrigues and bring his rascals to their knees; but they were in no mood to suffer privation long, and that very evening one of their number swam to us, while his fellows spread out a white sheet over the side of their ship for a sign of peace. Coming aboard, this messenger said he had been sent by his commanders, Edward Parsons and Sanchey Rodrigues, to acknowledge themselves at my mercy, and to know what terms I would make with them and their company.

“‘Surrender yourselves prisoners to me,’ says I, ‘and you shall receive such treatment at my

hands as humanity prescribes, until I may deliver you to the ministers of justice to be dealt with according to your deserts.'

" 'Why, your honour,' says he ruefully, 'that is but to offer us a safe conduct to the gallows; and for my own part I would as soon trust to Providence in these wilds as to justice in England. 'Tis hard on us poor fellows, who would die honest men, and have no love for such plaguy adventurers as those who have brought us to ruin.'

" 'Nay,' says I, 'if you would have indulgence of me I must have good assurance that you are not willing accomplices of your commanders.'

" 'I take your honour at that,' says he quickly, 'for though I be here in the name of our commanders, my chief purpose is to plead for my mates. You shall have that assurance you demand before another day is past: set every one of us down for a born scoundrel else.'

" And with that he leaps into the sea, and swims back to his ship. In the middle of the

night following we were aroused by shots fired on the *Black Death*, whereby we knew that the men had risen in mutiny against their captains; but clearly they were prepared for this assault, for the fighting continued on and off all that night and best part of the day following; but about six in the evening the battle grew to its loudest, and after half an hour we perceived that 'twas decided one way or the other by the firing coming to an end, and a prodigious cheer being raised. Nor were we long in learning how matters stood, for shortly after the company, coming to the side of their ship with a waving of hats and much hallooing, swung up that wretch Rodrigues and his fellow, Parsons, by their necks to the yard-arm."

When my uncle had made an end of his discourse, I ventured to ask him if he had chanced to hear anything of Sir Harry Smidmore since he had been lying in these parts.

"Nay," says he, "I have seen naught of him; but I got tidings of him only yesterday from one of the pirates we have now aboard.

He tells me that before coming hither Rodrigues put ashore on that island where he set you and Smidmore, to see if hardship had subdued your spirits and inclined you to cast in your lot with him. There, on a post planted in the shore, they found a bottle tied, with a letter inside it signed by Sir Harry, telling how—to his great joy and the praise of Heaven—he had been found by an honest merchant putting in for water, and was about to sail with him thence for the city of Bristol. And so, Benet,” says he, “you have no reason to torment yourself on that score.”

CHAPTER LXVII.

LADY BIDDY BREAKS HER TROTH, AND WE HEAR
FALMOUTH BELLS AGAIN.

OUR carpenters set to work and patched up the sides of the pirate ships without delay, so that when the water gained still more they floated without leakage.

While this was doing, the rest of the companies were mightily busy making all ready for our departure. And to see the nimble bustle on all sides, and to hear the lively mirth, mingled with snatches of sea-songs, in every part, one would have thought there was not a sad heart aboard ; yet, Lord knows, there was one amongst them as heavy and dull as lead. For now I could reckon the number of days (within a few) that it would take us to reach England ; and once my Lady Biddy was landed there, and I was assured that Smidmore was alive, I must quit her for

ever, and go elsewhere to finish the rest of my life as I best could alone. However, I did my utmost to bear a cheerful and contented mien, for Killjoy is but a poor friend. I could find nothing to talk upon without constraint; but I went about with a quick step, as though I had all the business in the world to look after, and made a good pretence to sing songs and whistle old tunes—though they nearly choked me, for I could recall none but the ditties my dear lady and I used to sing together in our home in the cave. Nevertheless, despite my whistling, etc., I could see my dear cousin was anxious about me—for women do see through deceit and right into the very heart of a man as we can in no wise; and many a time out of the corner of my eye I perceived her watching of me with grave eyes and a drawn face—nay, once when I broke off whistling because I found I had got on to the tune of “Spring flowers be sweet” (which was our old favourite song), I saw her turn away with her dear eyes full of tears.

To cut this matter short, we set sail ere long,

and with a prosperous gale came ere long to the Canaries, where we rested to re-victual and better equip ourselves. Here were two or three English ships; and one day Sir Bartlemy, having come from a visit to one of our countrymen, told me that he had learnt for a certainty that Sir Harry Smidmore was in England, and that all the world did talk of his escape, etc., etc.

Hearing this, I perceived that now the time was come for making my last sacrifice; for 'twas useless to return to England, and, worse than that, to pain my dear lady with that dejection of spirit which I could not conceal. And so, after a night of such bitter struggling between my baser and better self as I am willing to pass over, I went to my uncle, as he sat alone in his cabin, and told him I had given up my design of returning to England with him, and should count it a favour if he would entrust me with one of the ships to go a-trading as his agent to Campeachy and those regions.

“Why, what maggot has bit you, nephew?” says he in amaze. “You have shown no dis-

position to go roaming since we quitted the Oronoque; nay, it seemed to me that your sole joy was to be with us, and that you could not rest out of sight of niece Biddy."

That was indeed true, but I felt I must indulge this delight no longer, but break away from that perilous, passionate attachment while I had the manhood to obey the advice of my conscience. But I could not explain this to my uncle, and so hung my head in silence, being as sore at heart as any man could be.

"Do you feel it is your duty, Benet?" says my uncle tenderly, after a pause; seeing, as I take it, how matters stood.

I nodded my head, not daring to speak, lest my strength should give way under the strain of anguish that I felt in thinking I must never again see my dear lady.

"In that case, dear fellow," says the kind-hearted old gentleman, getting up and laying his hand on my neck, "God forbid I should balk your design. You shall have a ship, and means for your venture, to boot, as being but a little out

of that great store of gold we have taken from the pirates. May the Lord prosper you in all you undertake, as doubtless He will, being just, as well as merciful.”

“We will say naught of this to my Lady Biddy, uncle,” says I, “for I know not how to explain my sudden turn of intention to her satisfaction.”

“As you will, nephew,” says he—“as you will.”

Then, taking my friend Matthew Pennyfarden aside, I asked him if he would come with me and share my fortunes.

“Lord love you, master,” says he, “that will I with all my heart, be it anywhere in the world.”

So we secretly fitted out a ship, and got all ready for the venture I had in my mind; and that being done, there was nothing left to do but to bid my dear lady farewell, which was a thing I dreaded woefully, yet saw no way of avoiding. However, the night before I designed to set sail, my uncle undertook to break the

news to my lady lightly, as if 'twere a sudden whimsey that possessed me.

The next morning as I sat in my cabin, looking at the chart which was to guide me to Campeachy, but my eye wandering from that part to the wilderness where the sweetest moments of my existence had been passed, my lady came on board, and ere I knew it stole to my side.

"Is that where you are going, Benet?" says she, leaning over my shoulder.

"Ay," says I, stammering like a fool; "Sir Bartlemy has told you?"

"Yes," says she, "and I've come to know where you mean to bestow your little comrade."

"My little comrade?" says I, choking with despair; "I have none."

"What's become of the little comrade?" asks she.

I could make no reply save by putting my finger on the map where, as I guessed, we had encountered the party sent to meet us, and my little comrade had put off her stripling's dress and donned her gown again.

“Your little comrade,” says she, bending over me till her glowing cheek was side by side with mine—“your little comrade has changed her dress, but not her heart, Benet. The little comrade who saw you striving to be a brother, knew you to be a lover, and liked you none the less because you failed. To hide your love was an effort; to hide mine a grief. Now you know why I was dull, Benet. I was sick of love, dear—sick of love.”

And with that she laid her cheek to mine, and such rapture seized me that I knew not what I did.

Yet presently a sudden recollection chilled me, and I said with a groan, “Smidmore!”

“Smidmore!” says she, her pretty brows creasing in anger and her lip curling with scorn. “Hast not my uncle told you of his treachery?”

“His treachery!” said I in amaze—“never a word.”

“’Tis because he would hide the weakness and shame of a man he had taken for a friend. When he found we were gone from England he

gave himself up to the flattery of his friends ; and instead of following us to our help, as we followed him, is paying his court to another. But why should I be vexed with him ? ” says she, her face melting with sweet kindness ; “ for, sure, no troth should bind us when we cease to love. And, in truth, dear Benet, had he been constant I must have broken my pledge, having no love but for you, dear—no love but for you. Take me, sweetheart,” adds she, stretching forth her hands, “ or else I die an old maid.”

THE END.

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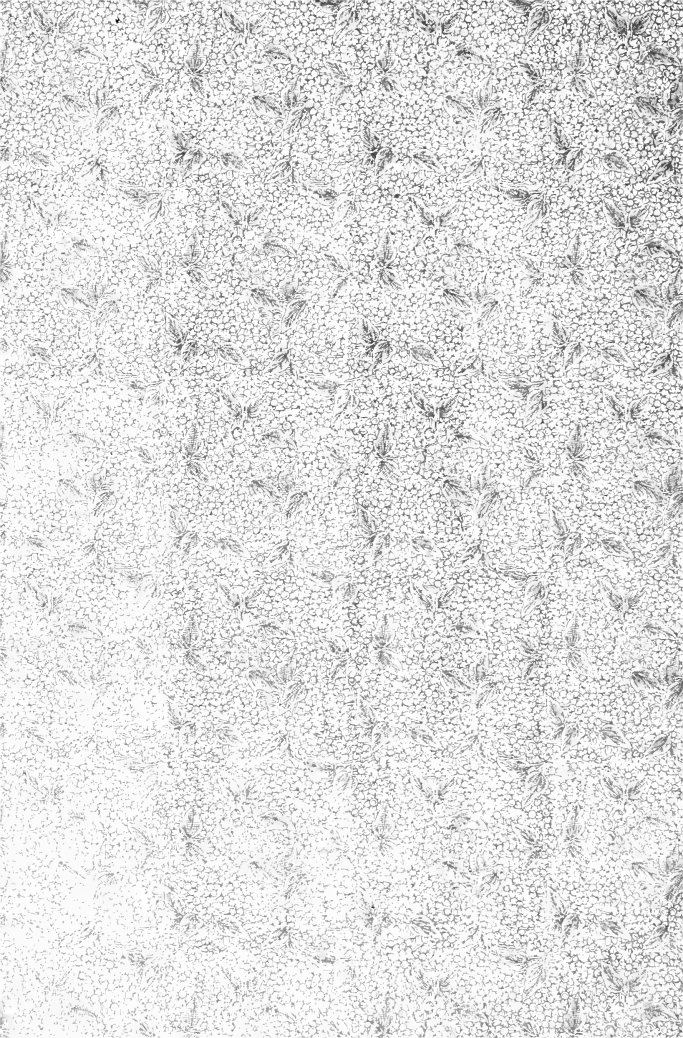
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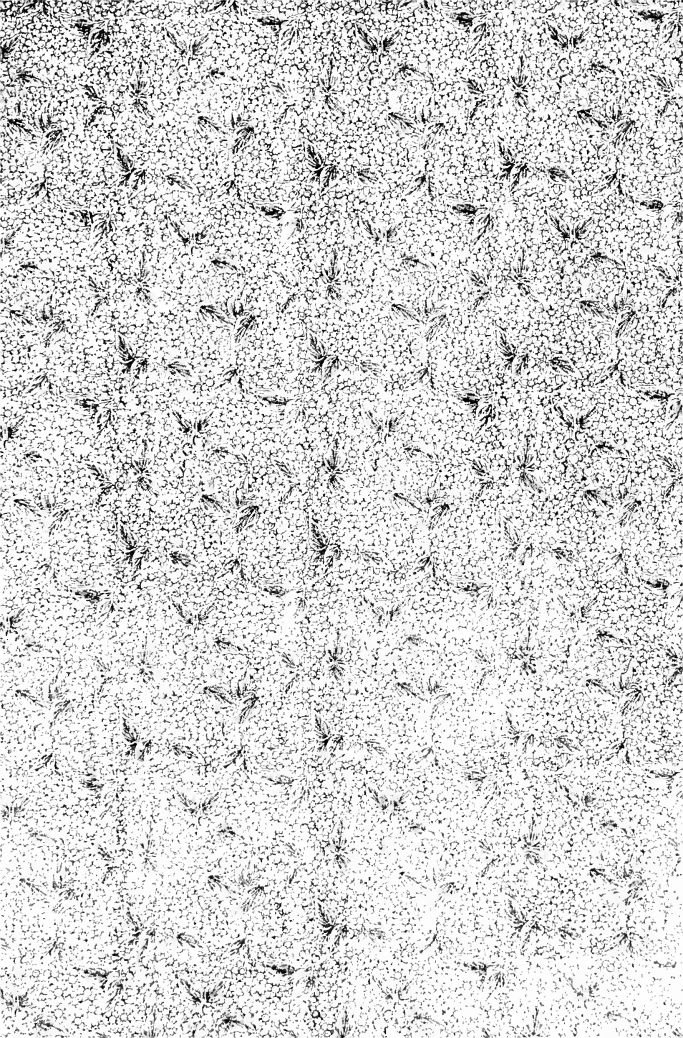
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